

THE HISTORY OF
THE ROYAL SCOTS FUSILIERS
1919—1959

BY
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Late THE ROYAL SCOTS FUSILIERS

WITH A FOREWORD BY
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THE ROYAL SCOTS FUSILIERS

Chapter 1

THE EARLY POST-WAR YEARS, 1919-1922

2nd Bn: *Russia*

1st Bn: *Ireland*

THE ROYAL SCOTS FUSILIERS were kept busy from the date of the Armistice with Germany in 1918 until the Second World War broke out in 1939. Skirmishes with the Bolshevik revolutionaries followed the end of the first war and involved the 2nd and 8th Battalions in the Denikin episode on the Black Sea. Sometime after the Tsarist surrender to the Germans at Brest Litovsk, the Allied fleets blockaded all accessible Russian ports and supplied munitions to the counter-revolutionary White governments scattered in various parts of Red Russia. The major intervention of the British Government was in the Middle East, where support was given to Kolchak, Denikin, Yudenich and their associates in the Black Sea region. Denikin, after some initial success, was overwhelmed by Budenny's cavalry early in 1920 and driven in confusion down to the Caucasian shores of the Black Sea. He refused to conclude an armistice and, in the face of great difficulties, evacuated the remnant of his forces to the Crimea under the cover of Allied troops in ships provided by the British and French Governments and escorted by a squadron of the Royal Navy.

2nd Bn: *Russia*

The 2nd Bn Royal Scots Fusiliers, which played a prominent part in this covering operation, had returned on April 7 1919 to Aldershot from the Army of the Rhine with a strength of 13 officers and 106 rank and file. On December 1, with a strength increased to 21 officers and 752 rank and file under command of Lieutenant-Colonel R. K. Walsh, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., the Battalion left Tilbury to join the Army of the Black Sea assembling at Constantinople. It became part of the 8th Brigade of the 28th Division, and was further reinforced before its transshipment across the Black Sea to the port of Novorossiysk, which was reached on March 11 1920. Heavy seas prevented the transports from putting into harbour until the following day, when the Scots Fusiliers' ship tied up at the Eastern Quay. The Battalion was made responsible for the defence of this quay and of the Cement Works, to which the British Military Mission to the White Army was being gradually withdrawn. The Red troops had not yet reached Novorossiysk, and as a tribute to Denikin, the commander of the volunteers who formed the White Army, it was possible to organise a ceremonial march through the streets. The Scots Fusiliers took part in this parade, which was watched by Denikin himself. By March 25 the Military Mission, intact, had been embarked in the transport *Hanover* and other ships. Next morning all British troops were removed from the defences of the Cement Works and embarked, except that two companies of the Scots Fusiliers had to control the approaches to the Eastern Quay, which were crowded with refugees. The Red forces were now approaching Novorossiysk and were harassed throughout the day by the guns of the British and French naval squadrons.

The War Office communiqué dealing with the evacuation of Novorossiysk on March 26 and 27 is a matter-of-fact account of the scene on the quays as the White volunteers with their wounded and crowds of hysterical refugees were being embarked under cover of the naval guns, while the British infantry held the harbour wharves and warehouses. "Before the entry of the Bolsheviks", the communiqué states, "the British military authorities were able to secure the evacuation of large numbers of families of officers, wounded and others who would have been exposed to reprisals by the Red troops. In addition, the British Navy by the most strenuous exertions were able to embark on the various vessels waiting in port large numbers of the volunteers, who had put up a heroic struggle during the past months. Although the British authorities, in pursuance of instructions, used every endeavour to ensure his personal safety, General Denikin would not avail himself of British aid to that end." A later War Office letter, sent to the Admiralty, declared that the British warships and transports removed at the last moment 8,000 Russian troops and a large quantity of war material, and that the assistance of the Navy made it possible for a further 25,000 troops to be evacuated in Russian ships.

On the afternoon of March 26 one of the two detached Scots Fusilier companies was embarked. Only Battalion Headquarters and "B" Company remained to guard the Eastern Quay. At 5.30 p.m. the transport *Hanover* sailed. At dusk, as the firing in the town intensified, the last of the Scots Fusiliers withdrew by stages along the Quay and the Mole. Here the British destroyer *Stuart* was waiting to take off the last detachments, which were later transferred at sea to the *Hanover*. The *Hanover* called at Theodosia, and two days later went on to anchor off the Golden Horn on the night of March 30. The Scots Fusiliers had been less than a month away from Constantinople and were now bound for India.

1st Bn: Ireland

Meanwhile the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers became involved in the situation in Ireland which ultimately led to the creation of the republican state of Eire.

The cadre of this Battalion, with a strength of five officers and 87 other ranks commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel A. D. McInnes-Shaw, D.S.O., left the Army of the Rhine at Cologne on May 13 1919. Arriving in Ayr on May 20 it was given a civic reception by the provost and town councillors. Under Lieutenant-Colonel F. E. Buchanan, who assumed command in July, the cadre went to Fort Matilda and there absorbed the 3rd Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel D. H. A. Dick, D.S.O. At midnight on July 15/16 the two units became the 1st Battalion. The strength in regular soldiers was 19 officers and 73 other ranks, and in temporary soldiers 46 officers and 1,070 other ranks.

In the same month the Battalion provided the carrying party, with pipers, at the funeral in Edinburgh of the Colonel of the Regiment, Lieutenant General the Honourable John Thomas Dalyell, who had held the appointment since 1909. He was succeeded by Air Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard, K.C.B., and D.S.O., later Marshal of the Royal Air Force the Viscount Trenchard, to whom John Buchan has paid fitting tribute in the previous volume of this history. "Of all the honours I have received", the new Colonel telegraphed to his Regiment, "I value this far and away the most." Early in 1919 a signal honour was conferred on the Regiment by the appointment of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales as its Colonel-in-Chief. On July 24 of that year, when the freedom of the City of Edinburgh was conferred upon him, the Prince wore

Scots Fusiliers' uniform for the first time and was received at Waverley Station by a guard of honour of 100 rank and file under Captain J. A. Stewart, O.B.E. Lieutenant N. G. Gane, M.C., carried the King's Colour. In the course of the year the Battalion was involved in a number of unusual occasions, including victory parades, memorial services, and special duties during the big railway strike. It was gradually settling down, however, to normal peacetime routine. In October the Lowland Reserve Brigade at Dunfermline ceased to exist and the Battalion came under orders of No. 2 District in Glasgow. Only a month elapsed before it left Fort Matilda for Bordon. As demobilisation gathered speed, the proportion of regular to temporary soldiers steadily increased. A year at Bordon produced some notable events, although it was mainly reconstructive in the sense of training, discipline and organisation. In February the Battalion was inspected by the Prince of Wales, by Sir Hugh Trenchard, and by the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Winston Churchill, who had commanded the 6th Bn of the Regiment in the First World War. The Prince, in his address to the troops said: "To the young soldiers I would give this advice: follow always the example of the men who fought in and won the Great War."

The disaffection in Southern Ireland had been going on for a long time. The so-called "Irish Troubles" began in 1919, one year before the Scots Fusiliers moved to Ireland. When the Scots Fusiliers arrived there in 1921 the situation was chaotic. On New Year's Day 1921 "authorised" reprisals had begun. The inhabitants of districts where outrages had occurred were held collectively responsible, on the assumption that the outrages could not have taken place without connivance. The punishments were burning and demolition of property. Fortunately the Scots Fusiliers were not involved in this repugnant role. The Battalion arrived at the Curragh on January 4 and was accommodated in huts at Rath Camp, with Lieutenant-Colonel Buchanan in command, Major R. M. Burgoyne, M.C., as Second-in-Command, Captain (later Major-General) H. W. V. Stewart, D.S.O., as Adjutant, and Captain (Q.M.) H. T. Hester, M.C., as Quartermaster. The 14th Brigade, to which the Battalion belonged, was commanded by Colonel-Commandant P. C. B. Skinner, C.B., C.M.G., and D.S.O., who was subsequently knighted. On January 15 "A" Company, under Captain G. C. Fleetwood, moved to Hunstanton House to assume responsibility for the North-Western area of King's County; and two days later "D" Company, commanded by Major (Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel) H. C. Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, C.M.G., D.S.O., was posted to Maryborough, the capital of Queen's County. Battalion Headquarters, with Headquarter Company commanded by Captain G. V. d'A. Innes and "B" Company under Captain J. A. Stewart, O.B.E., went to Tullamore, the capital of King's County. "C" Company under Major G. W. Browne remained for a time at the Curragh, later moving to Birr. Later still "D" Company handed over at Maryborough to the Gordon Highlanders and moved in to Tullamore. The Battalion formed part of the Abbeyfeix operational brigade, later commanded by Colonel-Commandant C. I. Stockwell, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

The official entries in the Record of Service have been supplemented by the Adjutant, Captain H. W. V. Stewart, who states that the role of the Battalion, like that of others in the various operational areas, was to reinforce the Royal Irish Constabulary, which locally had a reputation for calm sturdiness. Its broad duty was the protection of life and property, in so far as that was practicable in the turmoil. This duty was of course broken up by calls of the moment into a variety of tasks, such as the guarding of roads to keep communications open; the forestalling of raids by the Irish Republican Army; the rounding-up of suspects. The initiative was always with the rebels and the defence inevitably a step behind in its measures. No attempt could be made to

clear an area, since that would have been impossible without evacuating the civilian population and so admitting a state of war. The only counter-measures consisted of maintaining strong garrisons at selected points in the two counties, and frequent patrolling in box-bodied Ford cars, Crossley 18-cwt. tenders and 3-ton lorries. Two Peerless armoured cars each mounting two Hotchkiss guns were also available for assistance, but proved clumsy and unreliable. The flying squads held in readiness to deal with "incidents" were always absurdly late in their arrival on the scene; the quarry had struck long since and melted away, to re-appear elsewhere at some unguarded spot.

For the Scots Fusiliers life became as difficult and precarious as if they were actually engaged in war. The troops had no freedom. After the murders at the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin, and at Macroom, officers were restricted in their movements. No one was allowed to leave camp except in armed parties of three or more.

The most effective self-protection the Army could devise was to use its wits where battle training failed. Officers of the Scots Fusiliers were sent out to discover and study the tricks and booby-traps used by the I.R.A. As the Adjutant observes: "This was a tricky job and very efficiently done by Lieutenant Grant-Taylor, O.B.E., M.C., and 2nd-Lieutenant Strong, who were employed on intelligence duties. They were dressed as civilians and moved among the local inhabitants, picking up information as to the whereabouts of I.R.A. bands." Grant-Taylor, who had a splendid record of service in the First World War, was later to be accidentally killed by aircraft fire in April 1942, while watching an air support demonstration in England. For Strong it was the beginning of a brilliant career which led to the Allied hierarchy in the Second World War. As Major-General K. W. D. Strong, he was General Eisenhower's Chief of Intelligence at the Supreme Allied Headquarters in Europe, and one of the two general officers who negotiated the capitulation of Italy with Marshal Badoglio's emissaries at Lisbon in 1943. After the war he was knighted for his services.

During the "Troubles" the majority of the Battalion was billeted in the gaol at Tullamore. The adjoining courthouse served as the officers' mess. One wing of the gaol and the exercise yard were retained by the Royal Irish Constabulary for their prisoners. During the first twelve months of the Battalion's stay more than 80 Sinn Feiners captured by the Scots Fusiliers were detained there, all of whom had been identified by the R.I.C. as persons liable for trial on major criminal charges such as murder, arson and the like. Throughout its stay, the Battalion received the utmost support from the R.I.C. under their County Inspector, Mr. Ross, who was made a member of the officers' mess.

As the result of an agreement made between Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Eamonn de Valera the Scots Fusiliers received orders to leave Ireland. Colonel Buchanan went home early in 1922 on sick leave from which he never returned, retiring from the Service on July 22 of that year. Major Burgoyne, the second-in-Command, became responsible for handing over the prison and courthouse and all the Quartermaster's stores to representatives of the Irish Republican Army. On the morning of April 4 1922 the Battalion, with a strength of 18 officers and 266 other ranks, entrained at the Curragh siding and sailed in the S.S. *Tiger* from the North Wall at Dublin for Glasgow, the last British unit to leave the famous encampment. In his farewell speech Colonel-Commandant Skinner referred to "the high-spirited manner" in which its duties had invariably been carried out by the Battalion.

Before closing this chapter, it is perhaps permissible to strike a lighter note. In spite of the restrictions imposed, a few of the officers stationed at Tullamore and Birr were able to enjoy an occasional outing on the local golf courses. Their efforts were observed with close attention and no little amusement by armed fusiliers patrolling just off the fairway. There was also an occasional chukka of polo, in which the Commanding Officer took part. This too was policed by armed sentries. Finally, no-one fortunate enough to have been present is likely to forget the amateur theatricals staged by "A" Company at Hunstanton House under the energetic leadership of Captain Fleetwood and Second-Lieutenant Strong, in which the latter displayed yet another of his many talents.

Chapter II

BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS, 1920-1939

1st Bn: Glasgow—Portsmouth—Bordon—Palestine—Egypt—India

2nd Bn: India—China—Catterick—Aldershot—Edinburgh

While Britain was still involved in her domestic quarrel in Ireland events of grave importance were taking place in Paris, where the Allied leaders were attempting to lay the foundations for a lasting settlement of international disputes at the Peace Conference which resulted in the Treaty of Versailles.

1st Bn: Glasgow, 1922—1925

After leaving Ireland the 1st Battalion was to spend ten years in home stations before being posted abroad. The first of these was Maryhill Barracks in Glasgow where it arrived in January 1922. At this time there was a certain amount of industrial unrest in the city and the Battalion underwent special training for duties in aid of the civil power, an unpleasant role for which, fortunately, the troops were never called out. In August Lieutenant Colonel (Brevet Colonel) O. H. Delano-Osborne, C.M.G., D.S.O., succeeded Colonel Buchanan in command. Recruiting was at a low ebb. The war had inculcated in the civilian population a distaste for military service which neither depressed employment markets nor repeated War Office inducements could dispel. With municipal support the Regiment launched recruiting drives in Glasgow and in Ayrshire. To the accompaniment of the pipes and drums and the military band the Battalion marched through the towns and villages of its regimental area. As a result of these marches 52 recruits presented themselves for enlistment, but for medical reasons only 16 could be accepted, a melancholy reflection of the country's recruiting potential at this time.

The few drafts coming from the Depot at Ayr had to be quickly sent overseas to keep the Battalion abroad up to full strength. With only two or three hundred men in its ranks and many fatigues to perform the 1st Battalion was limited to the most elementary training, but the occasional provision of detachments for ceremonial events inspired a high standard in drill and turn out. In October 1923 the Fusiliers provided the Royal Guard during King George V's residence at Balmoral. Captain P. R. Margetson, M.C., was in command. Margetson retired from the Army in 1933 and served with the Metropolitan Police Force, reaching the rank of Assistant

Commissioner before his retirement in 1957. He was created C.V.O. in 1948, and K.C.V.O. in the Coronation Honours List in and was also awarded the Queen's Police Medal for distinguished service in 1956. The subalterns were Lieutenants A. D. G. Orr and I. D. MacInnes, and Company Sergeant-Major W. Bravery was the Warrant Officer. The previous occasion on which the Regiment had performed Royal Guard duty was in 1891, when the 1st Battalion provided the guard for Queen Victoria, founder of the Balmoral tradition.

On October 25 the Prince of Wales visited the recently completed shrine of the Scottish National Memorial to the dead of the First World War, in Edinburgh Castle, and later that day, as Colonel-in-Chief of the Regiment, he handed over the old Colours of the 2nd Bn to the Dean of the Thistle for safekeeping in St. Giles Cathedral. Outside the Cathedral the 1st Battalion mounted a guard of honour. In the evening, at a regimental reunion in the Assembly Rooms, 600 past and present members of the Regiment were presented to the Prince. Another noteworthy event during the tour of duty in Glasgow occurred in 1923 when the Battalion provided a guard of honour, commanded by Captain G. C. Fleetwood, for the Duke of York, later King George VI, on the day Glasgow presented him with the Freedom of the City.

The year 1925 saw the publication of the history of the Royal Scots Fusiliers by John Buchan. It was the express wish of the historian that his work should be regarded as a memorial to his brother, who had been killed while serving with the Scots Fusiliers in the First World War. John Buchan subsequently showed his continued interest in the Regiment when, as Governor-General of Canada (then Lord Tweedsmuir) he chose Lieutenant P J S. Boyle of the Royal Scots Fusiliers as his aide-de-camp.

1st Bn: Portsmouth, 1925—1928—, Bordon, 1929—1931

The Battalion arrived in Portsmouth at the end of 1925 still well below establishment. When inspected shortly after arrival in its new station by the commander of the 9th Infantry Brigade, its actual strength was 14 officers and 434 other ranks.

Apart from the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Regiment, the three years in Portsmouth under command first of Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. I. Jackson, D.S.O., and then of Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, C.M.G., D.S.O., who succeeded him in February 1928, were a period of normal routine training. The recruiting figures may not have been remarkable, but evidently the quality was impressive. A special Order of the Day in September 1927 by the General Officer Commanding the 3rd Division complimented his command on their endurance, good discipline and unfailing cheerfulness throughout the strenuous training carried out in the abnormal rains of that year on Salisbury Plain. But his thoughts were on the recruits. "The spirit of the young soldier", he remarked, "has been a credit to the example of his seniors, for both have been admirable."

The 250th anniversary of the raising of the Regiment was celebrated in 1928 by the 1st Battalion in Portsmouth, when the Colours were trooped in the presence of the Colonel-in-Chief. Later, the Prince of Wales had luncheon with the officers, and in the evening attended a regimental ball in the Guildhall, during which he joined in the set reels. To commemorate the occasion, a painting by the artist Gilbert Holiday of the defence by the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers of Jemappes Bridge on the Mons-Condé Canal on August 23 1914 was presented to the Battalion by past officers of the Regiment. In times of peace this picture hangs in the officers' mess.

At the Royal Military Tournament at Olympia that year the Battalion staged the main historical item on the programme, which represented the Twenty-First's defence of the Barrier at Inkerman.

An authentic story survives from an exercise on Salisbury Plain in 1928. The Battalion had spent the night holding a defensive line, and at first light the Divisional Commander went round inspecting the various positions. During his tour he came to a machine gun section which had layed its guns on the selected target area before dark the previous evening. The General spoke to the Fusilier on duty at one of the guns and asked him: "What are you laying on, my man?" "On my waterproof sheet, sir," was the ingenuous reply.

During its stay in Portsmouth the Battalion had shown marked skill with the rifle. In 1927 it won the Pike Spicer Challenge Cup and the Southern Command Weapon Training Officers Team Rifle Competition, coming second in the "Excellent" Cup and the Grand Aggregate Challenge Cup. The officers were as proficient as the men and in 1928 were runners up in the Ian Hamilton Cup, winning nine other prizes.

At this time the flags of the Regiment came under consideration by the Regimental Committee. The Colonel's and Lieutenant Colonel's (or Battalion) flags of the Regiment had undergone many modifications, and it was agreed to restore the original designs used in 1687. Later, in 1954, the original Major's flag was also re-adopted and flown at the Depot. Framed replicas of these flags hang in the regimental museum, with the inscription: "Copied from M.S: *Colours and Standards of The Army, James II (1685—1688)*, in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle."

1st Bn: Palestine and Egypt, 1932—1936

After spending two years at Bordon from 1929 to 1931, during which command passed to Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. L. Stanley-Clark, D.S.O., the Fusiliers were under orders to go to Palestine during the trooping season of 1932. On February 23 1932, after the traditional inspection by the Colonel-in-Chief, with their strength increased to 16 officers and other ranks, they embarked at Southampton for Haifa.

On March 6 the Fusiliers took over the Peninsula Barracks at Haifa from the 1st Battalion of the King's Own Royal Regiment. Four years of garrison and training duties followed. On December 10 1932 the Battalion moved to Moascar near Ismalia in Egypt, and in the spring of 1933 took part in brigade training at Beni Yussuf. Brigadier F. M. Pile, commanding the Canal Brigade, said that he was "satisfied that the Battalion ... has reached a very high standard indeed and is, in every respect, fit for war ". By the time it returned from the desert to barracks in Moascar the families of the Battalion had arrived there. During the trooping season at the end of the year two companies were posted to supplement the garrison troops in Jerusalem.

An outstanding exploit by Lieutenant Lindsay, now Sir Martin Lindsay, Bart., C.B.E., D.S.O., and Member of Parliament for Sol hull, deserves mention. In 1934 the War Office approved his appointment to lead an expedition to explore the ice cap of Greenland, the main object of which was to map and photograph a range of mountains 300 miles long, reported to be the highest within the Arctic Circle. The expedition was successful and Lindsay was awarded the Gold Medal of the French Geographical Society. He subsequently wrote an account of the expedition in his book, *Those Greenland Days*.

In February 1935, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel B. H. Badham, D.S.O., who had succeeded Colonel Stanley-Clark in 1934, there was a month's hard desert training at Helwan. The emphasis was then on training and still more training. Nevertheless, in the sporting activities of the British Army in Egypt the 1st Battalion made a very definite mark during its stay in the country. In the season of 1933—1934 it began to make its presence felt, particularly in football, boxing and cross-country running. The peak year was 1934—1935, in which the All-Round Championship was won by the Battalion; the football team made a clean sweep of the three football trophies and the other Scots Fusiliers' teams were consistently semi-finalists or better in all the major games and sports. The final year in Egypt saw another clean sweep of the football competitions and successes at other sports, although the Battalion did not succeed in repeating its victory in the All-Round Championship. These successes were due in the main to two factors: first, to the enthusiasm and keenness of all ranks, combined with an influx of fine sportsmen in a draft which arrived at Haifa from the 2nd Bn; and secondly, to the unfailing encouragement and help given by the Commanding Officer and by his Second-in-Command, Lieutenant-Colonel J. E. Utterson-Kelso, D.S.O., M.C.

In 1936 the 1st Battalion returned unexpectedly to Palestine. During the early years of the British mandate in that country no working compromise had been reached between Jews and Arabs, but they lived together without undue antagonism. Then, as a result of pogroms against the Jewish population in Nazi Germany, multitudes of industrious Jews, many highly educated, began to arrive in Palestine from Central Europe, sweeping away all measures previously in force to restrain immigration and giving real substance to Arab fears of being overwhelmed. A spontaneous revolution under Arab leadership broke out in April 1936 with the declaration of a "National Political Strike".

Under the terms of the British mandate the 1st Battalion was ordered to reinforce the garrison of Palestine in May. Previously due to sail for India in the autumn trooping season of 1935, its itinerary was thus changed by the rising tension in Palestine. The Fusiliers arrived in Sarafand on May 10 1936. One company went to Jaffa, another to Haifa and a third to Gaza. Organised terrorism existed everywhere. Looting, armed robbery and sabotage were rampant. The situation was reminiscent of Ireland in 1921. The strike continued for six months and resulted in about 400 Jewish casualties. About 100 Arabs lost their lives, but not at Zionist hands; the Jews behaved with admirable restraint. "The social and political decorum of the Jewish National Home and its high degree of group discipline", observes a contemporary volume, "were never so convincingly demonstrated—in striking contrast to the later period of Jewish terrorism in 1944—48."

From May to October the Battalion played its part with other British troops in policing the area, protecting Jewish convoys, and answering a host of other calls on its services. The fact that casualties on both sides were small was due partly to the rocky terrain, which amply protected the Arab guerrillas, and partly to a native lack of marksmanship with out-of-date weapons. The difficulties inherent in the situation are noted somewhat sharply in the Battalion War Diary: "The disobliging Arabs always fire from bullet-proof cover and are rarely seen." Nevertheless, from May 22, when they first came under fire, the Fusiliers expended some 20,000 rounds of light automatic, and 5,900 rounds of rifle ammunition. One Fusilier was killed, and one officer and six other ranks wounded. One officer, Lieutenant M. R. J. H. Thomson (later Brigadier M. R. J. Hope Thomson, D.S.O., O.B. E., M.C.), at that time regimental signal officer, was awarded the Military Cross for his gallantry in action.

The old city of Jaffa presented a major problem to both police and troops. A curfew had been imposed, but could not be effectively enforced because of the warrens of the old city. Eventually a solution was found by blowing with explosives two highways through the maze of ancient masonry and bazaars. This was done on June 18 by the 42nd Field Company, Royal Engineers, with guards for their working parties provided by "A" and "D" companies of the Fusiliers. A cordon was formed round the old city by the 2nd Bn of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment. Two companies of the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders and a section of the 6th Bn Royal Tank Corps were in reserve. The first explosion shook the city at 3.15 p.m., and the final detonation at 6 p.m. opened a clear passage right through it. "There was no opposition at all," states the record. "The population was completely cowed"

One of the biggest engagements during the troubles occurred three days later, when the Battalion suffered its first casualties. A detachment was entering a defile which had become appropriately known as "Windy Corner", when the leading lorries of the escort came under heavy fire from steep hills on both sides of the road, and two Fusiliers were badly hit as the troops jumped out to occupy firing positions. Both riflemen and machine gunners were heavily engaged for over half an hour and were able to disengage and continue with the convoy only after the arrival of reinforcements from the Seaforth Highlanders with tanks and armoured cars. During the weeks in which the Scots Fusiliers escorted the convoys they were fired upon ten times.

The Arabs employed "hit-and-run" tactics. Bombs were exploded, trains derailed and villages fired. The inhabitants of Yibna were fined £100 on July 2, when two agitators were arrested in the village. The arrival of the 2nd South Wales Borderers at Sarafand on July 23 considerably reduced the Fusiliers' area of responsibility. During 85 days in Palestine sentries and detachments of the Battalion were fired on some 60 to 70 times; but only 10 of these attacks were in daylight. By August 4, 1814 vehicles had been escorted in convoy to their destinations.

The Arabs had taken too long to rouse themselves to action; they were unorganised and lacked arms and effective leadership. By October 12 they had been forced to submit, and the "Palestine Emergency" was over. The 1st Battalion left the country on October 30, after receiving the congratulations of Lieutenant-General J. G. Dill, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., the General Officer Commanding British Forces in Palestine. It embarked at Suez on November 26 1936 and sailed for Karachi in India, remaining in that country until after the outbreak of war in September 1939.

2nd Bn: India, 1920—1930

The 2nd Bn left Constantinople in November 1920, to serve in India for a period of 10 years before moving on to China. This was a time of deep unrest in India. The campaign against British rule was steadily gathering strength. Shortly after its arrival at Barrackpore, where it was first stationed with two companies detached at Dum Dum, the Battalion was indirectly involved in civil disturbances through the person of the Regiment's Colonel-in-Chief, The Prince of Wales. This was during the uneasy vice-royalty of Lord Reading, who was entertaining His Royal Highness in the course of a long-deferred visit to India. The Prince was greeted inhospitably at Bombay and "was protected only with difficulty from outright personal insult".

However, all was quiet in Calcutta on December 4, when the Battalion lined the streets for the reception of His Royal Highness and the officers attended a levee at Government House. The

Colonel-in-Chief was to have presented new Colours to the Battalion at Barrackpore on December 29. Unfortunately the Colours were delayed in transit at Bombay and the carefully prepared programme had to be altered. Making the best of an awkward situation, the Colonel-in-Chief carried out an inspection of the Battalion and watched the trooping-off of the old Colours. From Burma, where his itinerary had taken him, the Prince sent a message to the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel R. K. Walsh in, which he said: “. . . although it was a matter for regret that the new Colours had not arrived,” he felt sure that “the spirit which animated the Regiment to uphold the honour of the old Colours would be maintained with regard to the new.” The new Colours eventually reached their destination and were presented on February 19 1921 by His Royal Highness to a colour party at a church parade in Delhi.

On March 27 1923 Lieutenant-Colonel H. E. R. R. Braine, C.M.G., D.S.O., assumed command of the Battalion following the retirement of Colonel Walsh, and in the autumn of the same year the Battalion moved from Barrackpore to Sialkot in the Punjab. Shortly after its arrival in Sialkot one company was called out to assist the civil power at Amritsar. Although the troops did not open fire their presence helped to quell one of the recurring religious clashes in this ancient Sikh stronghold.

A subaltern who joined the Battalion in 1924 writes: “Having left the 1st Battalion—strength about 200 and mostly doing fatigues—at Maryhill Barracks in Glasgow, it was a real joy to find oneself in the full-strength 2nd Bn at Sialkot. The Battalion combined a hard core of the older war-experienced officers and men with the fresh blood which was flowing in from Sandhurst and the Depot. Pre-war traditions were in full flower. There was tremendous *esprit de corps* and robust competition between companies in work and sport. Training was hard and realistic both in the plains of the Punjab and in the foothills between Jammu and Kashmir. In the interests of the Battalion’s health and welfare the officers showed a lively interest in organising and taking part in the games and recreation of their men. Off duty it was a gay and colourful life. Polo predominated and with a British and an Indian cavalry regiment and a battery of horse gunners in the station the Battalion gained much experience on the polo ground. There was scatter-gun shooting within reasonable distance, and bigger game was hunted on the Himalayas and in the Central Provinces. Kashmir was a two-day motor run away for leave and relaxation when the heat of the plains became unbearable.”

In competitive sport the Fusiliers had their full share of successes. Boxing had several expert devotees, including Lieutenants H. D. Watt and F. A. H. Wilson. Fusilier Algie won at his weight in the Lahore District Tournament, and Fusilier Byman was heavy-weight champion of India. Pig-sticking also had its adherents and Lieutenants M. A. Lindsay, J. R. Ellis and J. V. Bailey went out with the Ferozepore Tent Club. But the sporting prowess of the Regiment had always shown itself best on the football field. The Records of Service contain constant evidence of this in both the regular and the war-time Battalions. It was in keeping with their regimental reputation that in 1924 the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers won the British Units Football Tournament of Lahore District, and went on the following year to defeat the Cheshire Regiment by five goals to one in the final of the Indian Football Association Shield.

In 1926 the scene changed from the plains of the Punjab to the hills of the North West Frontier. On March 15 the Battalion marched by the Grand Trunk road to Landi Kotal on the Khyber Pass. A year was spent in this outpost, where the main occupation was mountain warfare training. In January 1927 Colonel Braine left the Battalion on home leave pending vacation of

command. Major J. A. Stewart, O.B.E., assumed temporary command until the arrival of Lieutenant-Colonel R. Q. Crauford, D.S.O., in October. At that time the adjutancy was filled by Captain E. Hakewill Smith, M.C., who later became commander of the 52nd Lowland Division in the Second World War and Colonel of the Regiment from 1946 to 1958.

By February the Fusiliers had returned to the Punjab and were stationed at Ferozepore. For some years a weir had been under construction on the River Sutlej which flowed near the city, in order to harness the waters for irrigation. On October 25 the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, declared the weir open at a ceremony for which the Battalion provided a guard of honour commanded by Major G. C. Fleetwood. In this arid station life was pleasant during the winter, but the extreme temperatures and dust storms of the hot weather inevitably had their effect on the health and spirits of the troops. Although half the Battalion at a time was sent to Dalhousie or to Solon and Daghsai in the Simla hills, the climate took its toll of those left on the plains. The Record of Service states that the monsoon failed twice in Ferozepore, and deaths from heat exhaustion and pneumonia appear among the entries. The death of a sergeant's young son from hydrophobia strikes a melancholy note.

The 2nd Bn celebrated the 250th anniversary of the Regiment in Ferozepore on December 18 1928, when the Colours were trooped before the Commander-in-Chief in India, Sir William Birdwood, a former officer of the Regiment's 3rd Militia Battalion. "It is over 45 years now since I joined at the barracks in Ayr," said the Commander-in-Chief. "Since those days I have had many occasions of serving with the Scots Fusiliers in peace and war. I was first on active service with the Regiment on the Samana and in Tirah in 1897. I saw much of the Regiment in South Africa from 1899 to 1902 and again, in the Great War, I was not only with your 1st and 2nd Bns but also with many other Battalions of the Scots Fusiliers." Regimental games were held that afternoon and in the evening there was a ball both in the officers' mess and in the sergeants' mess. The Fusiliers of the Battalion were entertained at, the cinema and a dance was held for them afterwards. To mark the occasion, the Battalion was presented by former and serving officers with an oil painting by the artist T. C. Dugdale, depicting the 2nd Bn defending the Kruiseecke Ridge on October 30 1914, during the First Battle of Ypres. The picture now hangs in the Regimental Headquarters in Glasgow.

The Battalion was well trained in rifle shooting. In 1928 Captain G. L. Ritchie obtained second place in the All-India Championship and was first in the British Army in India Championship. In the Ferozepore Brigade Area Rifle Meeting the Battalion teams won most of the competitions. For the greater part of 1929 "C" Company was on detachment at Amritsar, where internal security was always a pressing problem, and in December another rifle company left training at Malwala Camp and went to Lahore as a precautionary measure during the Christmas week sessions of the National Congress Party. Shortly after Battalion Headquarters, with "A" and "B" Companies, had arrived in Daghsai in April 1930 for their three months tour of duty in the hills, they were ordered back to Ferozepore to meet a threat from the Congress Non-Violence Movement. The troops marched through excessive heat and dust down twenty miles of winding road to the plains, where they entrained at the railway terminus of Kalka.

The Title of "Fusilier"

Before continuing the story of the 2nd Bn it is appropriate to record the change of title accorded to the rank and file of Fusilier regiments, and also the adoption of the Erskine tartan by the Pipers of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, both of which occurred during the period under review. Up to 1923, the man in the ranks of Fusilier regiments, in common with his counterpart in most other infantry regiments, was called a "Private ". By Army Order 222 of that year the title for soldiers in Fusilier regiments was changed to "Fusilier ". Regimental Standing Orders have this to say on the subject: "The title 'Fusilier' arose from the practice, in the later part of the seventeenth century, of arming certain selected troops with the fusil, a flintlock musket superior to the matchlock musket in use by the rest of the army. One of the duties of Fusiliers in those days was to guard the artillery and it is pertinent to note that the Regiment's first Victoria Cross was won while carrying out this role in the Boer War of 1899 to 1902. The first two regiments of Fusiliers are the 7th (Royal Fusiliers) and the 21st (Royal Scots Fusiliers). Buchan considers that both regiments were armed with the fusil in 1685 when the Royal Fusiliers were first raised. Although the Scots Fusiliers is the older regiment, numerical order was ruled by the date on which regiments came on to the English establishment. Fusilier regiments were regarded as *corps d'elite* and the suffix 'Fusiliers' was awarded at later dates as an honour and title of distinction."

A further distinction followed in 1928 to mark the Regiment's 250th anniversary. Army Order 142 of that year announced that His Majesty the King was graciously pleased to approve that the ceremonial Erskine tartan should be worn by the Pipe-Major and pipers of the Regiment. This too is explained in Regimental Standing Orders: "About 1880 the Highland doublet with tartan trews was introduced for Lowland regiments. When regiments were consulted about the adoption of a tartan, the Scots Fusiliers raised strong objections and the Scots Guards refused to conform. The tartan selected for the Regiment was the old blue, black and green Government tartan, issued in 1729 to the Independent Highland Companies. It is clear, however, that there was never any real historical basis for the adoption of this tartan and it was not until 1928 that the first step was taken to introduce, for the pipers, the clan tartan of the Earl of Mar. Later, in 1951, when a new Number One dress was under review, the Hunting Erskine tartan was adopted by the rest of the Regiment."

2nd Bn: China, 1931—1932

In December 1930 the Battalion, now under command of Lieutenant-Colonel R. V. G. Horn, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., sailed in the troopship *Nevasa* for Shanghai, where it arrived on New Year's Day 1931. Japanese designs on the Chinese mainland had become apparent during the First World War. In return for her adherence, practically non-militant, to the Allied cause Japan expected a tolerant attitude towards these ambitions. Japanese aggression in Asia invariably coincided with disputes or difficulties among the Western powers. In 1931 America was in the throes of a major economic disaster. Britain also was faced with serious industrial depression, while to add to her embarrassments the crews of some Royal Naval vessels at Invergordon had protested against pay cuts and the demonstration had been magnified by the international news services into an alleged mutiny. To the Japanese the time seemed ripe for their pursuit of aggressive intentions.

The Fusiliers were quartered in hutted camps at Great Western Road and Jessefield Park. "The camps were not well suited to the extremes of climate," writes Colonel Horn. "These extremes

varied from 20 degrees of frost on arrival to over 100 degrees in the hot weather. Coming from a very hot plains station in India, the men found the cold trying. For reasons of economy during the hot weather, ice and fans were cut off, thereby increasing the discomfort." Presumably this was the result of a note from the Army Council which enjoined economy in the forces" so as to contribute to the restoration of national prosperity "Shanghai was an unhealthy city," continues Colonel Horn, "and for various reasons it was one of the worst stations in which British troops were stationed at this time.... Combined training was impossible and we concentrated on individual training and the instructions of officers and non-commissioned officers."

There were duties, however, peculiar to this station. A general state of insecurity produced rich opportunities for the lawless, and there was a steady increase in piracy on the Yangtze. The Scots Fusiliers provided guards for merchant and passenger ships going up-river and found the task diverting. Two officers and 100 other ranks were accommodated in H.M.S. *Caradoc* at Hankow. The trip of 1,000 miles up-river to Ichang, which lay just below the famous "Gorges", occupied six weeks. Nearly every guard was engaged with pirates at least once.

The first year in Shanghai was mostly spent in this manner, but in early 1932 the period of flirting with war suddenly ended. The strained relations between China and Japan broke into open hostilities. "The Shanghai Emergency" had begun. The troops were confined to barracks, and as part of the local defence plan the Battalion held a four-mile front to protect the International Settlement. The Chinese and Japanese were fighting just beyond the perimeter and a few ill-directed shells and bullets fell inside the Battalion lines, but without casualties. It was regarded as fortunate by Colonel Horn that he was not attacked for, as he says: "With our extended and thinly-held position, we could not have withstood serious assault, especially as we had no artillery." Reinforcements arrived early in February, including the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, a mountain battery and the 31st United States Infantry Regiment from the Philippines.

The Scots Fusiliers were now awaiting normal home posting and were withdrawn into reserve. It was bitterly cold and snow fell. Measures were taken to alleviate discomfort by providing baths and suppers in the Union Jack Club. The ladies of Shanghai mustered a concert party and someone of undoubted goodwill, but with a curious sense of occasion, organised a lecture on "China".

On March 18 1932, on the arrival of the relieving regiment, the Royal Scots Fusiliers embarked in the troopship *Lancashire*. Two presentations were made to them before they left Shanghai.

One was a gift from the 4th Regiment of the United States Marine Corps: a silver model of the Corps cap badge, mounted in a frame. The other was presented by the Shanghai Volunteer Corps: a framed miniature Colour, with the national colours of the twelve countries in the International Settlement embodied in the crest. The 31st United States Infantry Regiment paraded on the Racecourse as the Scots Fusiliers marched to the quayside. As the transport sailed past the China Squadron down the Whangpoo River all ships were dressed and bands played. On April 14 the Battalion reached home, where it was met at the port of disembarkation by Lord Trenchard.

On return to the United Kingdom the Battalion was stationed at Catterick Camp in Yorkshire, where it remained for three years engaged in the normal activities of a unit in a home station: weapon training, brigade and collective training, participation in the annual military tattoos at York and Leeds, and a numerous variety of sporting activities. In April 1933 Lord Trenchard visited the Battalion and presented medals. Gheluvelt week was celebrated in October with the usual festivities. During the same month a stained-glass window presented by the Battalion was unveiled in St. Aidan's Church by Brigadier Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, who, by a happy coincidence, was at that time commanding the Catterick Brigade. Later in the year, on December 16, the Colonel-in-Chief inspected the Battalion, which he had last seen at Barrackpore in 1921. Towards the end of 1934 Colonel Horn left the Battalion on his appointment as Assistant Quartermaster-General on the staff at Scottish Command, and was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel R. A. D. Moseley, O.B.E. During September of that year the Battalion took part in combined operations training with the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.

In August 1935 the Scots Fusiliers travelled by march route to Tow Law in County Durham, one of the so-called "distressed areas" of that time, to assist the civil authorities for a short spell. The Divisional Commander, Major-General G. W. Howard, C.B., C.M.G., in whose brigade the 1st Battalion had served while in Portsmouth six years previously, said of the 2nd Bn on this occasion: "Amongst their good points, I shall always remember their efficiency, cheerfulness and marching powers." In November the Battalion changed station and moved to Aldershot. The rail journey was enlivened by an outbreak of fire in one of the trains, which destroyed the officers' baggage and the orderly room papers.

2nd Bn: Aldershot, 1935—1938

At Aldershot the Scots Fusiliers were quartered in Marlborough Lines, as part of the 5th Infantry Brigade in the 2nd Division, which Major-General A. P. Wavell was then commanding. At this time each infantry Battalion possessed a machine gun company of three platoons, called the support company. These companies were now withdrawn, and instead certain selected Battalions were equipped entirely with machine guns, as support Battalions. The 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers was chosen to be one of these machine gun Battalions. It became a fully mechanised unit with motor transport, the drivers of which were Fusiliers trained by the Royal Army Service Corps. However, in April 1937 the War Office decided to reduce the number of machine Battalions, and the role of the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers reverted to that of a normal rifle Battalion.

During the Battalion's tour in Aldershot the ceremony of King Edward VIII's Proclamation took place, and the Fusiliers were picked for street lining duty in the Strand, near the Savoy Hotel. In May 1936 Lord Trenchard paid a visit to Aldershot and inspected the Battalion. In July the band and the pipes and drums played in the grounds of Buckingham Palace at a garden party, and were inspected by the King. The year 1936 also saw the Battalion taking part in large scale manoeuvres in Sussex, during most of which they were under canvas in Pet-worth Park. In December there was another ceremonial occasion, when the Battalion lined the streets at Temple Bar in London for the Proclamation of King George VI.

For the Coronation in 1937 the Battalion provided a party in the procession in addition to street lining duty, and also found administrative staff for the camps in Hyde Park and Regent's

Park. In March the Battalion paraded on the barrack square for the first time with fully mechanised transport, and later went to Cambridgeshire for manoeuvres. While at Aldershot the Scots Fusiliers had a good record in sporting activities; the officers did well at point-to-point and race meetings, and the Fusiliers at football. The bandboys of the Battalion won the Enlisted Boys Football Cup and the 1st XI the Aldershot Command Football Shield.

2nd Bn: Edinburgh, 1938—1939

In March 1938 the 2nd Bn returned to Scotland for the first time in 60 years. It took over from the 1st Gordon Highlanders in Redford Barracks, and marched along Princes Street to relieve the Castle Guard. Soon after settling in the Battalion carried out a motorised recruiting drive in Ayrshire. In May it provided a Guard of Honour at Holyrood Palace for the Lord High Commissioner during the Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and in June took part in the Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. In December Lieutenant-Colonel W. Tod, M.C., took over command from Lieutenant-Colonel Moseley.

During 1938 the Battalion had assumed responsibility for the Edinburgh Garrison Beagles. It also sent a team, in charge of Captain R. S. McNaught, to the Army Motor Cycle Trials at Aldershot, which came in first of all the infantry regiments competing. The season 1938 / 39 was also a noteworthy one for the football team, which won the Scottish Command Cup and reached the semi-finals of the Army Cup, in which they were defeated by the Durham Light Infantry by the narrow margin of two goals to one. The hockey XI won the Command Hockey Championship.

In June 1939 the Battalion spent some weeks training at Stobs Camp, near Hawick. It was back in barracks at Redford on the morning of Sunday September 3, when the Prime Minister informed the country that Britain was at war with Germany, and at once began preparations to serve overseas with the British Expeditionary Force.

Chapter III

THE LAST STAND OF THE 2nd Bn **IN FRANCE, 1939-1940**

The phoney war —The advance into Belgium— The withdrawal— The Ypres-Comines Canal— The last stand

2nd Bn

On September 4 1939, the day after Britain declared war on Germany, the first elements of the British Expeditionary Force moved to France. By September 19, I Corps was overseas, and II Corps by October 3. Enemy air attack was expected, and in consequence the short sea routes were avoided. The westerly ports of France were used and the main traffic routed through Cherbourg, Brest and Nantes. By mid-October four British divisions were established on the

Franco-Belgian frontier; by March 10 divisions, including the 5th Division, composed of three brigades which arrived independently during October and November. One of these three brigades was the 17th, which included the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers.

At Aldershot in October the 17th Infantry Brigade had comprised the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders, the 2nd Northampton-shire Regiment and the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers. In France, where the brigade landed at Cherbourg on October 18 1939, the 2nd Seaforth were replaced by the 6th Seaforth from the 51st (Highland) Division. Thereafter the 17th Brigade remained unchanged throughout the war. The original brigade commander was Brigadier M. G. N. Stopford. The 5th Division, consisting of the 13th, 15th, and 17th Brigades, came into being in France late in 1939.

2nd Bn: "The phoney war"

During the six months of inaction which became known as "the phoney war", the British Army, including the 5th Division near Lille, with the Scots Fusiliers at Secin and later at Halluin near Tourcoing, was employed in the preparation of defences on the frontier and in the perfection of its own battle skills and standards. The French-made fortifications were strengthened and modernised. Hundreds of pill-boxes were constructed, miles of broad-gauge railway laid, headquarters shelters and anti-tank ditches dug, a vast network of buried cables installed, nearly 50 new airfields and satellites prepared. All this work was carried out in severe winter weather. One measure in particular amongst those taken at this time was to have a profound effect on later events. The masses of stores and ammunition dumped along the lines of communication, especially those north of the Somme, were to prove invaluable to Lord Gort, the Commander-in-Chief, during the long march to the sea which ended at the port and on the beaches of Dunkirk. Great emphasis was laid on the training of personnel. This was as urgent as work on the defences. The hard-trained professional elements of the Expeditionary Force had been diluted by the absorption of reservists and territorials and the pick of the noncommissioned officers had been sent as instructors to training areas at home and abroad. "The phoney war" was tedious for the troops, but was lightened by home leave, which began about Christmas time and ended before the traditional "campaigning season" opened again in March. In the spring of 1940 the 5th Division went back to the neighbourhood of Amiens for field exercises. It was relieved by a Territorial Army formation, the 42nd (East Lancashire) Division.

The peace-time routine prevailing at Amiens was broken when the Germans launched their attacks on Denmark and Norway in April. The token resources which had been intended for the help of Finland were diverted to Norway. British opinion demanded action, and a major expedition was organised to counter the seizure of Norway. The entire 5th Division was originally assigned to this enterprise, along with Battalions of French troops, to link up with surviving Norwegian elements. The 15th Brigade actually reached Norway and was in action; but the 17th Brigade was halted at Le Havre, since the Germans had completed their conquest of the country and it was useless to despatch more troops. Instead, the 17th Brigade was sent to St. Pol to train with tanks.

But the blow struck in Norway had been only a preliminary. The German Army continued its premeditated programme, and on May 10 1940 invaded Holland and Belgium. When Poland had been crushed and dismembered, the tank and the dive bomber had been perfected by the Germans

as weapons of offence. With these weapons they now swept through the Low Countries. "The phoney war" was over.

2nd Bn: The advance into Belgium

In accordance with "Plan D", and in response to the appeals of the Low Countries, the French and British forces were set in motion in the early hours of May 10. On the left flank of the long Allied line, which extended from the coast to the guarded Italian border, was General Giraud's Seventh French Army, then the British Expeditionary Force, and next in order to the south the French First and Ninth Armies. By May 11 "Plan D" seemed to be making substantial progress. The Seventh Army had pressed on to the occupation of Antwerp and its other objectives; the spearhead of a British Armoured Brigade was on the River Dyle south of that city; General Billotte's First Army, in which the B.E.F. was incorporated, was hastening towards the Meuse.

The Germans had swept forward with 126 divisions. The armoured groups consisted of 3,000 armoured fighting vehicles of which 1,000 were heavy tanks. General von Bock hurled 28 divisions into the assault on the Low Countries on a front stretching from the North Sea to Aix-la-Chapelle. The Belgians recoiled stricken from their principal bulwark, the Albert Canal, the firm possession of which had been regarded as essential to the success of "Plan D". The Dutch gave way completely, and the Seventh French Army hurriedly escaped from Holland. The First French Army and the B.E.F. on the Meuse held their positions, although two panzer divisions had forced the river. The mortal blow, however, had been delivered through the mountains of the Ardennes by General Rundstedt with 44 divisions, which thrust forward from the Moselle towards Sedan. The French Ninth Army, guarding the exit of this approach from the east, was dispersed by weight of armour; it consisted of inferior troops which had been stationed in that region because of French confidence that the Ardennes were impregnable against tanks. A breach 50 miles wide and 60 miles deep was driven into the Allied front. The onward sweep of the tanks affected the whole line, and when Laon fell the first French Army and the B.E.F. were withdrawn in three stages to the Scheldt.

When Hitler invaded the Low Countries on May 10 the Scots Fusiliers, at Seclin near Lille, were without their commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Tod, who was on leave in Scotland when the news came. He first learned of the invasion from the head waiter of the Station Hotel in Perth, where he was staying, telegraphed to the War Office for instructions and obtaining no reply found his own way to Cherbourg. There he was told that there was no transport to the forward areas, as France was in utter confusion. He found, however, among the thousands of officers and men of different units, all anxious and impatient, two kindred spirits, an acting commanding officer of a Cameronian unit and the second-in-command of a Wiltshire Battalion. With the assistance of the Port Commandant these three senior officers were embarked in a motor torpedo-boat, which had arrived from England and was carrying maps to Dunkirk. The motor boat tore along the coastline to Dunkirk, where Colonel Tod found evidence that the war had indeed become active. Seven bombed-out ships, some still burning, lay at various angles in the port. Although their own craft was bombed, the party got ashore and plunged among the refugees. They commandeered one of the abandoned cars on the quay and set off on the road from Dunkirk to Ypres in search of their units, having no information at all of their destinations. "The road was thick", Tod says, "with Belgian refugees, mixed with hundreds of Belgian soldiers without arms

but carrying suitcases and household articles of all sorts. I found this somewhat depressing and not like the Belgian form of the first war.” The fifth-columnists were at many crossroads directing traffic and shouting that the Germans were just behind, although the only sign of Germans were the planes which bombed and machine-gunned the roads. Quite by chance Colonel Tod, searching the villages in the Ypres area, came upon the 17th Brigade Transport Officer, who was able to direct him. The 2nd Bn was in the village of Seclin, in the vicinity of Lille. Tod rejoined it in the evening of May 24 and, as he says: “gave my companions a whisky-and-soda and news of their own Battalions “, before taking over command from Major P. D. Morrison.

On May 11 the 17th Brigade had been ordered from the vicinity of St. Pol into the battle area. The Scots Fusiliers were then commanded by Major Morrison, the Second-in-Command, who was captured later in the month. This first advance is described in the regimental records by an officer of the Battalion:

“There followed three days of marching in very hot weather along dusty country roads and at the end we found ourselves at Monchy Gayeux, 40 miles nearer the enemy than when we set off. There we rested for a day and from then on things began to happen more rapidly. On the afternoon of the 15th the Battalion embarked in troop-carrying transport and moved off heading for Ninove in Belgium.

“This journey, like all others that followed during the next ten days, was slow and tedious, for not only were the roads overburdened with Army vehicles moving into Belgium but there was also a steady stream of civilian traffic moving back in the opposite direction. This consisted of every form of vehicle —lorries, private cars, horse-drawn carts and wagons and even perambulators. In addition, there were thousands of pedestrian refugees leaving their homes in search of safety. As we approached the battle area the roads became more densely congested. The inhabitants had for the most part forsaken their homes, taking with them such of their valuables as they could carry and leaving behind them a state of confusion and chaos which can only be described as appalling.

“Farmers had turned their stock out loose in the fields to take their chance of survival; cows were roving about the countryside bellowing to be relieved, some of them were already lying dead and blown, overcome by neglect and terror or, more mercifully, killed by shells. Colonies of tame rabbits hopped about the steadings waiting to be fed. In the towns and villages a few of the inhabitants had remained and were now creeping through the streets like ghosts, unwilling to desert their homes yet fearful of what was to come. One entered an empty house and found that the inmates had left hurriedly; the remains of a meal was on the kitchen table, beds recently slept in were unmade, drawers and cupboards lying open, all bearing witness to panic-stricken flight.”

It was now the morning of May 16 and the Scots Fusiliers had reached Ninove. Two days earlier ill news had come of the breach at Sedan. The Belgians were retreating from the broken defences of the Albert Canal to the fortifications of Antwerp. The French Seventh Army was withdrawing along the coast. The Germans were over the Meuse at Dinant with two armoured divisions and had severely mauled the French First Army on the British right. The I and II British Corps were withstanding all assaults from Wavre to Louvain on the River Dyle, which the 12th Lancers, the British light armoured spearhead, had reached in the first onrush into Belgium. By the time the Scots Fusiliers arrived at Ninove and moved into position on the Charleroi Canal in the vicinity of Hal, the situation had worsened. Laon, sixty miles westward of Sedan, had been reduced. This threat to the two British Corps and the First French Army, combined with an

intensification of pressure on their particular front, made imperative a withdrawal towards the Scheldt. The 5th Division was to cover the withdrawal in this situation, which was critical and continually deteriorating.

Low-flying enemy fighter aircraft gave the Fusiliers their baptism of fire by the Charleroi Canal early in the morning of May 17. "The attack", states an eye-witness, "was greeted with the utmost enthusiasm by the 'Jocks', who threw down their picks, shovels, cooking utensils or any other paraphernalia they happened to be holding at the time, seized their rifles and in the space of about ten minutes had pumped thousands of rounds at the enemy aircraft. Their efforts achieved no material result, but the episode put them in very high fettle!" In the course of the morning and afternoon the retiring units of I and II Corps passed through the Scots Fusiliers' positions and the canal bridges were blown. Towards evening advanced elements of the enemy, in close pursuit of the British Expeditionary Force, were feeling their way towards the canal and began lively exchanges with the Battalion which were maintained during the night. Twelve hours after the passage of the Army, the Battalion joined in the retreat as rearguard.

2nd Bn: The withdrawal

"This march was a very trying one," the record observes. "The men started out in a very poor frame of mind. They had been working, almost without cessation, for the last 24 hours on a position where, they had been told, they would meet and defeat the enemy. Now, before the battle had been joined, they were told that the battle had been postponed. Add to this that the roads on the line of withdrawal were crammed with vehicles and personnel and that the maps of the area with which we had been provided were so inaccurate that it was impossible to follow them along a previously unreconnoitred route. It will thus be appreciated that when the Battalion eventually reassembled west of Grammont, after a march of some 18 miles, tempers were short and already we were beginning to wonder whether the much-talked-of war of movement meant that we should be on the move continually without ever coming to grips with the enemy." From Grammont the Battalion moved on without stopping to Lesquin. On the way it was harassed by the Luftwaffe, but without damage or casualties.

The Scots Fusiliers were now in territory which had been a battle ground of their Battalions during the 1914—1918 war and embraced the familiar names of Douai, Lens and St Eloi. On 4 May 20 news reached Lesquin of the breach at Sedan and, as the regimental record states: "Orders were issued for a counter-attack by the 5th Division, with the object of closing the gap between the B.E.F. and the French on their right, which had been caused by the enemy breakthrough. The early morning of May 21 saw the Battalion in an assembly area south of Lens and in the afternoon we moved forward to take up a defensive position on Vimy Ridge, facing south-west. This position was occupied by 5 p.m. and during the remaining hours of daylight was subjected to dive-bombing attacks by formations of enemy aircraft. These attacks were alarming; it was annoying to find that the enemy were undisputed masters of the sky in this as in every other area into which we had penetrated, but apart from this feeling of annoyance and discomfort these aerial attacks achieved nothing and we suffered not a single casualty."

At this stage the British Expeditionary Force was extended roughly in the form of a letter "U". At the base of the "U" was Arras, surrounded on three sides by German armoured divisions. The right vertical of the "U" ran north-eastwards to Oudenarde and the junction with the Belgian

units, which were then still fighting; while the left vertical extended to the north-west as far as Hazebrouck. This uncomfortable salient was not continuously manned, but was held only by detachments of troops. Interspersed with the British at various points were groups of the fragmented French armies, all watching and fighting as best they could, not knowing the whereabouts of the manoeuvring enemy with any certainty. In such circumstances the one hope of salvation—a pincer movement to eliminate the German tank corridor while it was still vulnerable and before it could become a destructive highway through France— was stillborn. Lord Gort was short of troops and concerned for the protection of his ammunition columns on the threatened route from Dunkirk, his port of supply. Nevertheless, aware of the urgent necessity of a junction between the B.E.F. and the French Ninth Army to the south, he strove from May 17 to reinforce his southern flank at Arras and informed the French commanders in the area of his intention to thrust southward with two divisions and an armoured brigade. To this striking force the French promised to add two divisions. The British divisions employed in that bold sortie were the 5th and 50th Divisions. The British attack from Arras duly developed, but it brought no response from the French in the south. After some initial success the attack broke down under the increasing strength of the enemy. This determined the fate of the B.E.F. It was clear that an aggressive role was now far beyond its powers and that its extrication from Arras would be of itself a perilous operation.

On May 21 the southward thrust from Arras by the 5th and 50th Divisions and the 1st Army Tank Brigade was launched, as arranged. General Franklyn was in command. The attack was made from the western and southern defences of the city with an objective on the River Sensee, which descends from high ground to the north near Bapaume and passes through Croiselles to Arleux. The French were allotted a sector to the east on the Arras-Cambrai road. The British had only 65 Mark I and 18 Mark II tanks, all with worn-out tracks, to lead the way. A violent resistance was offered by 400 tanks of the German 7th and 8th Panzer Divisions (of which the 7th was commanded by a general named Rommel). Four hundred German prisoners were seized in the first rush, although the Sensee was not reached. A crushing counter-attack, rapidly mounted, with greater numbers and inevitable air superiority, imposed heavy losses on the British.

By May 22 the advanced brigades of the two divisions—the 13th Brigade of the 5th Division and the 151st Brigade of the 50th Division—had retired overnight together with the tank brigade behind the protection of the River Scarpe, where they were joined by supporting formations descending from Vimy Ridge, including the 57th Brigade with the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers. The Fusiliers attacked from the western suburbs of Arras in the afternoon and gained the few hundred yards up to the banks of the Scarpe. They were continuously molested by German aircraft but without serious casualties. In the evening, however, their position was intermittently shelled, presaging an attack, which developed on the morning of May 23. The German infantry approached the positions on the Scarpe but was immediately halted by the fire-power of the French artillery which was supporting the Brigade. A breach effected on the right of the Brigade front, however, materially weakened the security of the position and by about midday had enforced a general withdrawal, pivoting on the Battalion's left flank, to a fresh front. This operation was unavoidably carried out in full view of the enemy and the unit's first substantial casualties of the war were inflicted. "A" Company suffered most, losing amongst others Major F. A. Adamson, who was wounded.

The new position, which roughly followed the line of the Arras-Souchez road, was occupied before dark and digging began again in the twilight. At 2.30 in the morning of May 24 the newly-dug position was once more reluctantly abandoned and the withdrawal resumed without enemy interference. It was not a moment too soon. Arras was still nominally in Allied possession, but its fall was imminent. St. Eloi was taken from the French and Lens collapsed soon afterwards, resulting in the encirclement of the western flank. Imposing masses of enemy armour advanced on the eastern flank as evening fell on May 23. At 10 p.m. that night, in order to avoid total destruction, General Franklyn retired.

“In the early hours of May 23,” the record continues, “the Battalion was ordered to come out of action. The withdrawal, which was skillfully carried out under the command of Major P. D. Morrison, was made along a very devious route. The enemy was already closing in from both flanks. At daylight the Battalion, which was acting as rearguard to the Brigade, was subjected to low-flying attacks from aircraft and shelling, as well as long range machine gun fire. Lieutenant I. S. Thomson (carrier-platoon commander, who was killed on May 28), was largely instrumental in enabling the Battalion to disengage and in securing our flanks and rear during the 27-mile march back to Douai.” Time and again this resolute and quick-thinking young officer, by the skilful exploitation of his carriers, saved the situation in day-long engagements with the oncoming regiments of Germans on both flanks and in the rear.

A wood near Douai eventually provided some shelter after the fighting retreat. Motor transport arrived on schedule and the Battalion drove back to Sedin on the old winter line, to be reunited with its returned commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Tod.

On the evening of May 25, at 6 o’clock, Lord Gort ordered the 5th and 50th Divisions to extend the front of II Corps northwards to close the gap in the Belgian front. The 5th Division, traveling through the night, took over its allotted position, together with the 143rd Brigade of the 48th Division, on the left of the B.E.F. facing eastward to defend the line of the Ypres-Comines Canal, and thus closed the gap. Their arrival was narrowly timed. The Germans attacked after dawn on May 26. The battle raged all day, and so furiously that three Battalions of the 1st Division, which had been held in reserve, were drawn in. The both Division duly arrived to extend the line further to the north near Ypres on the left flank of the 5th Division. The right flank of the Belgian Army was in the air, its troops now quite incapable either of resuming contact with the British or of falling back on the Yser Canal to accord with the British plan. The Belgians collapsed completely on May 27. Their capitulation was made without previous consultation and at very short notice.

The escape of the British Expeditionary Force was at once rendered problematical. The gap was now beyond redemption, and upon the 5th Division fell the duty of holding secure the British flank at all costs. On the heels of the 50th Division the 3rd and 4th Divisions were hurried in lorries from south of Lille to close the widening breach. The new divisions were at once built into the eastern wall of the corridor. The power of the German onslaught could not be resisted, but its ultimate purpose, an inward turn over the Yser and thence to the sea to bar the way of the fugitive British formations, was thwarted, though by a very narrow margin. By May 30 the remnants of the B.E.F. were in temporary safety behind the perimeter at Dunkirk. The narrative returns to the morning of May 26 and to the Scots Fusiliers in their stand on the bank of the Ypres-Comines Canal.

2nd Bn: The Ypres-Comines Canal

The war diaries and other papers of the 2nd Scots Fusiliers were captured when Battalion Headquarters was overwhelmed, and they were never recovered. The account of their stand on the canal has therefore been pieced together with information from personal sources. The War Office issued at the time a journalistic despatch, which covered the facts and made this comment on the significance of the engagement: "There is no doubt that the action helped to stem the enemy tide for a few valuable hours. History had repeated itself; the same Battalion carried out a similar action in 1914 at Gheluvelt, less than five miles away, when one officer and about 100 men came out."

The following extract from a personal letter from General Sir Harold Franklyn to Colonel Tod, written some years after the war, deserves to be quoted here: "I remember a gunner C.O. of 18th Field Regiment saying that he had met you and that you had told him that you meant to hang on 'till the last man and the last round' and he added 'I honestly believe he really meant it'. I am sure that your spirit and that of others like you made a success of a difficult defensive action. Without it there would have been no Dunkirk on any scale and so perhaps real disaster."

The Regimental record continues the narrative:

"On the morning of May 26 the C.O. went forward from Seclin to reconnoitre the position along the west side of the Ypres-Comines railway, and during the early afternoon the position was occupied. The Luftwaffe was very much in evidence, but no attempt was made to interfere with our activities. About 2 p.m. all bridges in the Battalion area were blown. This meant that it was now impossible to withdraw our transport, which owing to difficulties of concealment had been located fairly far forward; this, however, had been pointed out to the Brigadier before the bridges were blown. At 4 p.m. forward elements of the enemy were reported on our right front, and shortly afterwards we were in contact with the enemy along the whole front. Just before dark we sent out two reconnaissance patrols which brought back useful information. Lively machine gun fire was kept up during the night.

"Artillery fire from both sides began at daybreak and the enemy employed his 4-inch mortars, particularly on the position occupied by 'A' Company on Hill 60. Our position was successfully held, but the 13th Infantry Brigade on our left was driven back. In order to conform with the situation, the Brigadier ordered the Battalion to withdraw across the Ypres-Comines Canal. By this time the forward companies were heavily engaged. . and before the operation could be carried out it was necessary to mount and deliver a local counter attack in order to give breathing space for the withdrawal. The Commanding Officer considered it inadvisable to use the reserve company for this purpose, since in their present position they were well situated to cover the withdrawal of the forward companies. Therefore he decided to use the fighting patrol to deliver the counter-attack. This attack, gallantly led by Lieutenants Cholmondeley and Maitland-Makgill-Crichton, both of whom were killed, achieved the purpose at considerable cost, and the forward companies disengaged and withdrew across the canal. The transport had to be abandoned, and most of it was hastily destroyed. It was only with great difficulty that the carrier platoon was able to make the crossing.

"New positions on the west bank of the canal were hastily occupied in the early afternoon. It was not long before the enemy felt his way forward and was again engaged by our forward companies. In spite of the inadequacy of our positions he was again successfully held, but before

darkness fell contact had been lost with the Brigade on our right. Forward elements of enemy had crossed the canal and were pressing round both our flanks. ... Colonel Tod decided to collect what remained of the Battalion round a farmstead to make a final stand. Except for machine gun fire there was no activity during the night.”

Further information is contained in a letter written after the Dunkirk operation to Lord Trenchard by Brigadier Stopford, who locates the Battalion’s original position approximately between Hollebeke and Zillebeke:

“The Scots Fusiliers were on the right of the sector and held the railway embankments south of Verbrandenmolen. On the evening of May 27 orders were received that the position must be held at all costs for the next 24 hours, to enable the rest of the B.E.F. to get away. The message was passed to the Battalion and I received a heartening reply from Tod—that the Scots Fusiliers would do all that was required of them. [The Public Relations Department of the War Office gives Colonel Tod’s reply in the more dramatic form: ‘Tell Brigade I’m not going a foot back.’] I again went up to see Tod during the night, leaving him about 3 a.m. on May 28.

“When I saw him he was with the Battalion H.Q. in a farm, and had with him Morrison, Arkwright, Knight and, I think, Thomson [Major P. D. Morrison, Major A. S. B. Arkwright, Lieutenant P. A. Knight, who was the Signal Officer, and Lieutenant I. S. Thomson]. We discussed that night what might be done with patrols.... He obtained contact with the units on his flanks and seemed quite cheerful about the situation. Very heavy enemy shelling began about 4 a.m. and at 6 a.m. heavy infantry attacks developed. The situation for the rest of the morning was very obscure and it was almost impossible to get information even by runners and liaison officers....Very few stragglers got back and I am sure that what happened was that they fought it out to the bitter end.”

2nd Bn: The last stand

“At about 3 in the morning of the 28th “, according to the regimental record, “the Brigadier arrived at Battalion H.Q., having passed through enemy held territory. He told the Commanding Officer that our position must be held at all costs until 9 o’clock in the morning, by which time it was hoped that a counter-attack by the Guards Brigade would have relieved the situation sufficiently for the Battalion to come out of action. Accordingly, just before daybreak, the remains of ‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies moved out to their original positions on the canal bank. Since the farmstead was an obvious target for artillery and mortar fire, the C.O. moved Battalion H.Q. a few hundred yards forward. When daylight came it was apparent that the enemy had completely surrounded our position. Not only were the forward companies securely pinned to their ground but it was also impossible to maintain touch with them.... As the hours went by our hopes of a relieving counter-attack dwindled. Shortly after 9 o’clock (on May 28) the C.O. decided to move his H.Q., along with such stragglers as he could collect, into the farmstead again; it did, at least, provide a certain amount of cover from small arms and it offered a good field of fire on three sides. This last move was carried out under heavy fire. The C.O. was wounded by fire from the rear. We were completely cut off and no longer capable of holding up the general advance of the enemy. The fighting spirit of the troops, however, remained intact. During the next hour we continued to take toll of the enemy in his repeated attempts to assault the position. Such a situation could not continue indefinitely, and Battalion H.Q. was finally overwhelmed at 11

o'clock, roughly at the same time as our forward companies were also overrun. What remained of the Battalion, that is to say, the personnel of 'B' Echelon, along with a few stragglers, under the direct orders of the Brigadier, made their way back to the beaches of Dunkirk, whence they were evacuated. But this chapter of our history must close on the fateful morning of May 28 1940. For on that day the Battalion ceased to exist until its re-formation in the United Kingdom."

The final experiences of the Battalion were described after the war by Colonel Tod, released from German captivity after five years imprisonment:

"At first light on May 27 I extended what was left of the Battalion and advanced from the farmstead, sending Ian Thomson and his carriers to try and contact the unit on our left. No sooner had we taken up a position on the edge of a wood than the German attack began. Very soon they had broken through our thinly-held position and, at the same time, had come round both flanks and were behind us. It was at this time that Peter Green, bringing me news of the situation on the left, was badly wounded, but nonetheless, delivered his message; his leg was amputated later in a German hospital. I then decided that our only hope was to fall back on the farmstead again. There at least we could put up some sort of all-round defence. This was done, and on the way back I was hit and knocked into a stream.

"We held the farmstead for some time, both sides lobbing bombs at each other. It was during this fight that a bomb was thrown at Arkwright. His servant, Leyden, tried to catch it but it exploded in his face. We thought Leyden was killed. His face was smashed but I met him later as a prisoner, the face beautifully patched up but with a rather Jewish nose. Arkwright got some of the bomb but was only badly bruised. The situation soon became quite hopeless. The Germans were still around, the barn was full of wounded and our ammunition was all but expended "Rightly or wrongly, I then surrendered. The time was about 11a.m.

"After I had been a prisoner for more than a year someone brought me a cutting from a German newspaper. It contained an account of a deed for which a German captain had been decorated. The gist of it was that on May 28 near Voormezelle he had destroyed the tanks of a famous regiment of Scotland. There can be no doubt that this referred to Ian Thomson, and the tanks were his wretched carriers that were not even bullet-proof. That they were not bullet-proof I know, because early in May one of the Fusiliers let off his rifle by mistake and the bullet went slap through a carrier parked nearby."

There is no further reference to Lieutenant Thomson in Colonel Tod's account. He was killed on May 28 along with his friend Lieutenant P. A. Knight. They were first posted as missing, but a year later, when the War Office confirmed their deaths, a newspaper appreciation mentioned that together they had approached a house, subsequently found to have been occupied by German machine-gunners, and there met their fate. Thomson, who died on his 28th birthday, was a noted sportsman. He had led the Regimental team when it won the Army cross-country motor-cycle championship in 1938. He had his pilot's certificate. While still a boy at Fettes College he had climbed both the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc within five days. Knight, before his marriage, had lived with his father at Chawton where Jane Austen, his great-great aunt, wrote several of her novels.

In addition to Lieutenants Cholmondeley and Maitland-Makgill-Crichton (only son of Brigadier H. C. Maitland-Makgill-Crichton who is mentioned in previous chapters) Captain Sinton, who was with "A" Company on Hill 60, was killed on May 27. In the earlier fighting on May 22, Captain Adamson and Lieutenant McDavid had been wounded. Those officers wounded

on the Ypres-Comines Canal were Colonel Tod, Major Arkwright and Lieutenants Wilmot, Green, Mellish and Kempthorne. Mellish and two other reinforcement officers had been brought to the farmstead by Brigadier Stopford during his morning visit on May 28; Colonel Tod says of them: "I could do nothing with them at that stage; I don't think they even had rifles and, poor chaps, were 'in the bag' a few hours after their arrival." Lieutenant Wilmot and Kempthorne escaped to Dunkirk, Kempthorne having lost an eye. Apart from them, only those officers of the Battalion who happened to be at Brigade H.Q. and in the transport lines got away. These were Captain H. D. B. Goldie, who commanded 17th Brigade Anti-Tank Company and was later awarded the Military Cross for his work; Lieutenant A. F. Whitehead, also of the Anti-Tank Company, later wounded and awarded the Military Cross with the reconstituted 2nd Bn in Italy in 1944; Captain V. McNeil-Cook, who was later wounded with the 2nd Bn in Sicily and lost when a hospital ship was sunk in July 1943; Captain Butterworth; Lieutenant Shakespeare, the Transport Officer, who was killed near Catania in Sicily in 1943; and Lieutenant (Quartermaster) F. E. Cartwright. The senior warrant and non-commissioned officers of the party which reached the bridgehead were Regimental Sergeant-Majors Burr and McCreadie; Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant Arthur; and Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Brouse. According to Brigadier Stopford only 40 Scots Fusiliers were gathered at Dunkirk, but the numbers gradually mounted to 250 in the camp at Blackdown near Aldershot where the survivors were assembled—more, he says, than he had dared to hope for.

Before the curtain finally falls on the 2nd Bn of 1940 one more scene deserves mention. It is described in a personal memoir by Colonel Tod

"On the day after we were taken prisoner we reached a sort of P.O.W. collecting place. As soon as we arrived a car appeared and a German officer came to me, saluted and told me in English that General von Richenau wanted to see me. Von Richenau was commanding either a corps or an army. He was the general who commanded the IV Army Group that marched into Austria in 1938 and who, later, commanded an Army in Russia; he ended his days with a so-called heart attack in the train taking him back to Germany from Russia.

"I was taken into his room and, when I appeared, he got up from his chair, bowed and said in perfect English, 'I wish to congratulate you. I am told your troops fought magnificently. I hope you will have lunch with me.' He then said he realised what my feelings must be at being a prisoner but added it would not be for long. 'I promise you', he said, 'that you will be home with your family by Christmas.'

"Just then the telephone rang, and after he had talked for a bit he turned to me and said: 'You will be interested to hear that we have just taken Kemmel Hill. It was giving us a little trouble.'

"I said 'I am sorry to hear that; it now means we are in for a long war'—not a very scintillating remark but I was not feeling very scintillating and it certainly annoyed his staff.

"Von Richenau then told me to go in to lunch and he would follow. We had just started lunch—waiters with white coats and all that and me unshaved, muddy and covered with blood—when von Richenau appeared in his hat and coat and told me he had to go up to the front immediately. Neither von Richenau nor his staff asked me any questions about the situation or about units of the B.E.F."

Colonel Tod ultimately became Senior British Officer in the German prison camp at Colditz, in south-eastern Germany, where the Nazis sent the "unregenerates" and incurable escapers among the Allied prisoners of war. His exploits at Colditz may be read in two books by P. R.

Reid, *The Colditz Story* and *The Latter Days*. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his services in the field, and was later made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in recognition of his work at Colditz and other prison camps, from which he organised many successful escapes.

The Adjutant of the Battalion, Major A. S. B. Arkwright, who escaped from Oflag VI B in 1942, an act of bravery which won for him the award of the Military Cross, has himself described his experiences in his book *Return Journey*.

Chapter IV

THE 6th Bn with THE 51st (HIGHLAND) DIVISION IN FRANCE, 1940

The Maginot Line—Back to Normandy— The River Bresle— The withdrawal to Belleville—Le Ham-c—The departure from France

WHILE the 2nd Bn was engaged in Belgium, another Battalion of the Regiment was fighting with the 51st (Highland) Division. This was the 6th (Territorial) Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Rowallan. It withdrew from the Maginot Line, stood and fought as the situation demanded, and narrowly escaped capture at St. Valery. The following account of its memorable journey of 400 miles from Kendange to Rouen has been paraphrased and abridged from Lord Rowallan's own story.

After the 1914—1918 war the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers was disbanded. It was re-formed in April 1939 following the Government's decision to double the strength of the Territorial Army. The new territorials found themselves woefully short of transport and almost every other type of equipment. Accommodation and training facilities were grossly inadequate. There were not enough permanent staff instructors to go round and arms and ammunition were available only in the most meagre quantities. Within a few days of the opening of recruiting the new Battalion reached full strength in rank and file, one of the first in the Territorial Army to do so. Thus the "Fighting Sixth" began its new life with distinction. Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Rowallan was the first commanding officer and many well-deserved tributes have been paid to him for the way in which he built up the unit by his unfailing insistence on the highest standards. When the outbreak of war severed all ties with the parent 4/5th Battalion, the new Scots Fusiliers had to stand on their own feet long before they were ready to do so.

In October 1939 the Battalion was in Hawick as a unit of the newly formed 15th (Scottish) Division which, as its historian Lieutenant-General H. G. Martin has written, "was begotten by national necessity out of the 52nd (Lowland) Division." The Battalion was well below war establishment. It had only 10 officers, and many more non-commissioned officers were needed. About 130 militiamen fresh from civilian life had to be trained, and instructors were as rare as gold. The unit had no transport except a few untested vehicles and arms; equipment and even uniforms were unbelievably scarce. Nevertheless the Scots Fusiliers were ordered to stand by in readiness to join the British Expeditionary Force in France early in 1940 as one of the newly

created Pioneer Battalions. The effect of the order was that officers, transport, equipment, and everything of which the Battalion had been short were provided. Unfit men and soldiers under age were transferred elsewhere, and reinforcements received and trained. A startling transformation had been brought about by March 1940, when the Fusiliers were at Fleet after short stays in Northumberland and at Aldershot. The Battalion was fully armed, fully equipped and fully staffed, but was sorely in need of training.

On April 4 the 6th Scots Fusiliers embarked at Southampton, the first duplicate Battalion of the Territorial Army to go on active service. It was a relatively smooth crossing, and as the *Amsterdam* docked at Le Havre anti-aircraft bursts peppered the sky. The Battalion disembarked, and soon the companies were installed in large half-timbered barns in and around the tiny Normandy village of Hattenville. The Fusiliers were soon at home with the local population. They were popular and well-behaved, and when they left for Lillers on April 10 there was not one claim against them. At Lillers the billets were bad, but a little scouting discovered satisfactory alternatives and the Battalion settled down there for a fortnight. Brigadier Utterson-Kelso, a Scots Fusilier well known to the old soldiers, was in Lillers and visited the Battalion.

6th Bn: The Maginot Line

Soon it was announced that the Battalion was to go to the Saar, the only active front of the war, on attachment to the 51st (Highland) Division. It had been decided that the British should take over a divisional front in the Saar from the French, and the task had been given to the Highland Division. The British establishment was lower than the French, and so extra troops were provided by the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers and the 7th Norfolks in order to fill all posts in the line. Each Battalion was to have one company permanently under command of the 152nd and 153rd Brigades of the Highland Division.

On April 24 the Battalion began a rail journey of 24 hours through Douai and Metz to Hagondange, and from there marched to Amneville, a steel town in Alsace. German was still the mother tongue of the older inhabitants, which was a great advantage to Fifth Columnists. The Fusiliers settled quickly into good billets, taking over the anti-aircraft posts and local defences, and made many friends. "A" Company was the first to go into the Maginot Line on the night of May 1/2, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Barclay of the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders.

The Maginot forts, with their impenetrable wire defences and minefields, big guns, underground passages, and elaborate fire plans covering every inch of wire and the minefields, were immensely impressive. Their power and the careful planning of their construction were subsequently proved by the way they held out after being completely surrounded. There was, however, no gun of larger calibre than 75 millimetres in the line itself. In front of the fortified line was the *Ligne de Contact*, a series of scattered independent posts on the eastern edge of the Forêt de Bouzonville. Behind was the *Ligne de Soutiens*, almost non-existent, and supposedly a support line; behind this again lay the *Ligne de Recueil*, with an anti-tank ditch a foot deep and slit trenches, situated on a forward slope giving an almost uninterrupted view over several miles. The Maginot posts were in telephonic communication with forward artillery observation officers, who by means of a code could ensure that any 100 metre square on the map received 100 shells within 60 seconds after a call for fire.

On taking over, the 51st Division found that the enemy had hardly been disturbed by the French. A flag flew at the German Battalion headquarters on Hitler's birthday, and the comings and goings at an enemy regimental headquarters could be clearly observed through field glasses. "No man's land" was from half a mile to a mile wide at Dampont Farm. Hedges, ditches, woods, copses and undulating pasture gave good cover and the enemy made full use of it; their forest wardens patrolled with dogs and moved almost as and where they liked. The wardens, local men, knew every inch of the ground and had friends, probably relations too, on the French side of the border. Every evening after dark "A" Company laid a network of black threads, each about three yards long and tied at one end, the loose end stretched on top of the grass in gateways and gaps in the hedges. In the morning the enemy's movements were easily read, and a detailed picture of patrol routes could have been built up had the Germans not carefully changed them nightly to avoid ambush. Nevertheless much useful information was obtained.

While "A" Company was preparing for the first contact with the enemy, the rest of the Battalion was kept occupied on pioneer duties. Eric Linklater records in *The Highland Division* that the 51st Division's two pioneer battalions, the Fusiliers and the Norfolks, "did some strenuous work. Forward of the Maginot Line they used mules to carry their building material, the only form of transport that could be taken right into the outpost line."

While the rest of the Battalion moved to Menskirch, "A" Company on its first night in the line drew blood, a claim confirmed by a sub-unit on its right which had observed the enemy carrying a man back to their lines. On May 8 "A" Company was relieved in the line by "C" Company and piped back to Menskirch, tired but cheerful.

On May 10, the day Hitler invaded the Low Countries, the Fusiliers were ordered to move out to St. François and dig in on the *Ligne de Recueil* on a front of 3,000 yards which had been allotted to them there. About 100 anti-tank mines and a few coils of wire were available; also one 2-pounder anti-tank gun and one platoon of medium machine guns which was not under command of the Battalion. On the evening of May 12 the Fusiliers' official orders arrived, but there was no reference in them to the relief of "C" Company, which was still in the Maginot Line. The Fusiliers were to hold their front on the *Ligne de Recueil* until the 154th Infantry Brigade of the 51st Division passed through, and for a further five hours thereafter. Moreover the 154th Brigade took the medium machine guns and the anti-tank guns with them as they withdrew, leaving the Fusiliers, 300 Strong, strung out on a front of 3,000 yards on a forward slope, with only 100 anti-tank mines and seven Bren guns. The situation appeared so likely to result in an unnecessary waste of lives that Lord Rowallan protested to the Divisional Commander, Major-General Fortune, who accepted the protest.

6th Bn: Back to Normandy

Meanwhile enemy shelling became heavier, especially at St François La Croix; but there were still no orders for the relief of "C" Company. One company of the 7th Norfolks was then put under the Fusiliers' command, soon after which the receipt of orders for the relief of "C" Company by "B" Company almost coincided with the arrival of the whole of the 7th Norfolks to take over from the Scots Fusiliers. As the Norfolks had no trench stores, preserved rations, Bren guns or signal equipment, the Fusiliers gave them three of their seven Brens and the few wireless sets they possessed, none of which they ever saw again. Then, Leaving "B" Company in the line

with the 4th Seaforth, the Battalion moved to a camp at Kedange, a small village behind the Maginot forts. There was no-one in command of the camp, no plan of the camp and no information. Battalion Headquarters spent the night in the open, which was no hardship in the prevailing fine weather, while "A" Company found billets in the village and "C" Company took over some huts in the camp. On the night of May 15 the 7th Norfolks arrived at the camp bringing news that the forward Maginot positions had been abandoned.

There had been an attack to the right of the positions held by the Seaforth Highlanders, to whom "B" Company was attached, in the course of which the enemy displaced the French and imposed a serious threat of a break-through. Lieutenant-Colonel H. Houldsworth, commanding the Seaforth, sent "B" Company of the Fusiliers under Captain Houison-Crauford to restore the situation and cover the withdrawal. Within 15 minutes Platoon Sergeant-Major O'Neill's platoon was engaged, followed quickly by the two other platoons. The withdrawal succeeded, Captain Crauford disengaged, and "B" Company set out on a 22 mile march to rejoin the 6th Bn at Kedange. Many of the company were picked up by lorries, however, when their whereabouts were known.

A few days later Colonel Houldsworth wrote a letter to Lord Rowallan, in which he said: "I had your 'B' Company under my command in the Saar; they did particularly good work in a difficult operation on the night of May 15/16, and I was so impressed by the way in which Houison-Crauford commanded and the manner in which the Company carried out its task that I personally recommended Houison-Crauford for a Military Cross."

Now that the forward areas had been abandoned the artillery was withdrawn behind the Maginot Line, and the constant firing of a battery of 6-inch Howitzers immediately behind the Fusiliers' camp kept even the most weary from getting much rest.

On May 20 the Fusiliers were suddenly ordered to Amneville, but immediately thereafter were told to go instead to the Bois de Blettange, which they shared with the 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Next day the orders to move to Amneville were repeated, but very soon there were fresh orders, this time to move to the villages of Grimaucourt and Moranville.

During the next 24 hours rumour chased rumour as the Germans advanced more deeply into France, cutting off the British forces from route after route. Eventually, orders were issued for a rail move to the north-west of Verdun. The Battalion entrained without its cooks and rations, which were to travel by road. When the Fusiliers arrived at Verdun at 4 a.m. on May 25 they were ordered to proceed to Le Mans without rations or cooking equipment. The outlook was gloomy, but at Troyes the men each drew a loaf of bread, two tins of bully beef and a pound of chocolate, and were given hot tea. At Orleans and Vitry coffee was provided at canteens manned by Boy Scouts; they were tired and half asleep, but their faces lit up when Lord Rowallan (whose prominence in the Scout Movement is too well known to need mention here) gave them the Scouts' salute.

Under hot sun and clear blue sky the train wound its way through a peaceful country-side, although at Vitry and elsewhere there were bomb craters by the side of the railway track. An account of the next few days can best be given in the form of extracts from the 6th Bn's war diary:

"May 27. Arrived Rouvray. No hot coffee for the men, but the rest camp not far away—four mile march. Enormous quantities of food and stores of all kinds thrown about in odd corners. Impossible to get any information as to whereabouts of the 51st Division. Lord Rowallan with the

commanding officers of the 4th Camerons, 4th Seaforth, 4th Black Watch, 5th Gordons and 7th Norfolks, decided to go to Rouen Sub-Area in a body. Discovered that 51st Division is at Gisors. Four rifle Battalions ordered to move at 6 p.m. Do not know what will happen to us.

"May 28. Still awaiting news of our advanced party and road party. No orders from 51st Division. At 10 p.m. Captain Gluckstein told us not to move except on orders from Division. Norfolks received operation order for one destination but do not know if it has been altered since issued.

"May 29. Buses waiting for us from French General Headquarters. Still no word from 51st Division nor is it possible to get in touch with them. Finally decide to go to Neufchatel ahead of buses to see Divisional Headquarters and warn them of our move. See Colonel Roney-Dougal and find destination is as stated in Operation Order. Go on to billeting area and learn that our transport has arrived and all safe. Whole Battalion arrives about 2 p.m. to have hot meal provided on our cookers by our own cooks. So ends the most extraordinary move—400 miles across France.

"May 30. A peaceful day. 'C' Company had trout for dinner, caught in a dry fly stream passing the door of their billets."

6th Bn: The River Bresle

It was not long, however, before the Scots Fusiliers were on the move again. They were ordered to take over the defence of a 12-mile front between Le Treport and Blangy on the line of the River Bresle. After a quick reconnaissance with his company commanders, Lord Rowallan provisionally allotted company fronts as follows: "A" Company from Blangy to Longroy; "B" Company from Longroy to Ponts-et-Marais; "C" Company from Ponts-et-Marais to the sea. The next day, May 3rd the Battalion marched and ferried with all its stores to its new area, using only its own transport. Battalion Headquarters were at Mesnil Reaume, a small village in a central position with good communications by road to all companies. Although to maintain this long front and take charge of 35 demolitions was a more than adequate task for the whole Battalion, a platoon of "A" Company had to be detached to guard trains at Feuquieres.

During a more detailed reconnaissance of the area a huge food store was discovered in the marshalling yard at Le Treport. The Royal Engineers had orders to burn it in an emergency. One train load of stores was got away to the rear, and rather than waste the rest, companies were told that they could take what food they wanted. Later, when communications were finally cut, the Mayor was asked to distribute anything left among the people of Le Treport; so the Germans got nothing of it, or very little.

By now the flow of refugees had increased. Many of the younger generation were bitter and unfriendly, but it was touching to see how the older people would produce a morsel of cheese or some other little offering as a tribute to their allies. Every Battalion vehicle that could be spared was used to transport elderly folk and young mothers with children to the railway station at Neufchatel. On at least one occasion a trainload was bombed and machine-gunned, with horrifying casualties, just as it was ready to pull out.

Reconnaissance showed that in most places the River Bresle was effective as an obstacle to tanks, but that nowhere could it stop infiltration by infantry. The demolitions prepared in advance were judged to be adequate for the defence and to cover all possible crossing places, except on

one branch railway line through Eu which passed right behind the defences. Unfortunately, no anti-tank mines nor explosives were available to demolish this danger spot when necessary, so that nothing more could be done.

News of the failure of a counter-attack by the 51st Division and the French on the Abbeville bridgehead was received on June 3. All further ferrying of refugees had to be forbidden. The Quartermaster was asked by a French Comtesse to allow her the use of just one truck, but she had to be refused, and was last seen driving her small car in the direction of Abbeville.

The Fusiliers were extended over a wide front, with platoons each responsible for holding several points. Sections did not possess so much as one Bren gun apiece to thicken their fire if attacked. However at the southern end of the line some men of the Queen's Royal Regiment were placed under command and provided a welcome addition in strength. Two French naval 75-millimetre guns mounted on a hill commanded the central sector, and a French motor-cycle company with 16 medium machine guns was stationed south of Eu to cover a network of railway and road crossings which formed the most dangerous approach. It was impossible, however, to keep any reserve in hand.

On the next day, June 4, enemy air activity increased. Some bombs were dropped on "A" Company, but caused no casualties. It was at this moment that Lieutenant Finch-Knightley sent his famous message, after making contact with the French machine gun company: "To O.C. 'A' Company— The French have agreed to co-operate with my fire plan." In fact, Finch-Knightley's platoon could contribute to the fire plan with one solitary Bren gun, but it was satisfactory to know that despite this he still dominated the situation. Meanwhile, the resources of the Fusiliers were further weakened by the detachment of Platoon Sergeant-Major Franks' platoon to cover another French 75-millimetre naval gun at Ault, where they found a hut in a childrens' holiday camp with bed and mattresses ready for them.

On June 5 German aircraft flew over to reconnoitre the Bresle defences. Again bombs were dropped on "A" Company without causing casualties. When Lord Rowallan visited the naval guns he found their crews dismounting them. When questioned, the officer in charge said that it would take him ~4 hours to get out of action, so he was starting there and then.

On June 6, in the early morning mist, a small motorised infantry detachment and some armoured fighting vehicles attacked Lieutenant Strachan's post, but were driven off. Shortly afterwards orders were issued that the 51st Division was to withdraw to the line of the River Bresle itself. During this operation the Fusiliers were to hold the crossings until the last troops had passed through their positions, after which all demolitions were to be blown. If, however, the demolitions were in danger of being rushed by the Germans they were to be blown earlier to prevent capture. Further attacks by light tanks and armoured cars occurred throughout the day, particularly on "B" Company's front at Ponts-et-Marais, Oust Marais, and Bouvaincourt, where the Fusiliers suffered their first serious casualties.

During one of these attacks Captain Houison-Crauford was visiting one of his section posts. He acted immediately, ordering the demolition to be blown and withdrawing the section to the cover of a building. One man, however, was wounded. Houison-Crauford found a barrow, wheeled it out under enemy fire and brought the man back to shelter, only to find that the building had now become a target for the German heavy mortars, which set it alight. The section had to find another position, but the crossing was held for a time. For his action Captain Houison-Crauford was awarded the Military Cross. Platoon Sergeant-Major O'Neill was also successful in

beating off a heavy attack on another post, for which he was awarded the Military Medal. For another gallant and successful action Lieutenant C. T. Korts was Mentioned in Dispatches.

There were similar and repeated enemy thrusts all along the front from Le Treport to Beauchamps and it became necessary to blow the crossings. By the time the Germans had reached Beauchamps it seemed evident that they had either given up hope of crossing the Bresle or were too occupied in harassing the remnants of the 51st Division, which was by now pouring across the still intact bridges between Beauchamps and Blangy. A few Germans had infiltrated into a wood at Ponts-et-Marais, and some of this party fired at Captain Money-Coutts' truck on the road along the southern bank of the Bresle, wounding the driver. One of the Germans was killed by Corporal Butgard and Fusilier Dixon, firing from the back of the truck. This phase was a trying experience for the Fusiliers, but the 51st Division was enabled to withdraw behind the river line and reorganise. On the night of June 6/7 the line of the Bresle was patrolled as far as resources would allow. At dusk it became evident that the German intention was to attempt a bridging operation at Ponts-de-Marais. The firing of an artillery concentration of 6-inch howitzers was followed by sounds of vehicle engines being hurriedly started, and further concentrations during the night prevented the attempt. In the morning, however, it was clear that more parties of German infantry had crossed into the Forêt d'Eu. Reports of attacks on Allied troops on the roads were numerous; but, as might be expected, many of them were false. Nevertheless, it was estimated that there had been up to 100 separate infiltrations, and it seemed probable that these enemy parties had not yet linked up. A concentration of artillery fire directed on to Ponts-et-Marais drove between one and two German companies out of the village. Lieutenant Weir went forward with a small patrol, but found no enemy after a thorough search of the Forêt d'Eu as far south as Bois de l'Abbé. However, enemy mortars and what appeared to be bursts of anti-tank gun fire were now giving trouble from further to the south. Divisional Headquarters were asked to send a force to drive out the enemy and restore the situation while this might still be possible, as it appeared likely that further infiltration during the night might make recovery impracticable.

On the afternoon of June 7 the line was reorganised and the Fusiliers were allotted a narrower, though still wide, front along a ridge from Eu to the sea. "C" Company was placed on the *left*, with company headquarters in Le Treport; "A" Company was on the right, with headquarters in Eu; "B" Company was in reserve with Battalion Headquarters in Flocques. The Fusiliers now formed the nucleus of an independent group, with the 1st Royal Horse Artillery, 213th Field Company, Royal Engineers, and a company of the 7th Norfolks under command. Late that evening "A" Brigade, consisting of the 4th Buffs, the 4th Border Regiment and the 5th Sherwood Foresters, was in position on the right of the Scots Fusiliers and made an attempt to clear the Forêt d'Eu, but was heavily repulsed.

June 8 was a trying day. The situation on the right flank deteriorated so badly that "B" Company had to take up a position facing south along the ridge. Heavy enemy dive-bombing attacks caused few casualties, but did much material damage in Eu and Le Treport. Shelling and mortar fire were incessant. A demolition in Eu was set off by a shell and caused casualties in "A" Company. In the Forêt d'Eu German troops were observed dismounting parts of an infantry gun from motor cycles with side-cars. The gun was soon in action against "B" Company, but did no damage. At 7 p.m. the 51st Division issued a warning order for a further withdrawal to Belleville.

6th Bn: The withdrawal to Belleville

The road to "A" Company's position at Eu was blocked by fallen trees and telegraph poles and was under constant fire. The dispatch rider could not get through with the order to withdraw, but Fusilier Parsons, who took over the task, managed to find a way after pioneers had cleared the road. However, there was an hour's delay in getting the message to "A" Company. The operation of bringing out the two forward companies along heavily shelled roads now began. For "C" Company, the rearward route had not suffered much damage and the move was comparatively easy; but Lieutenant Gow, who had been left in charge of "A" Company, had great difficulty in disengaging, collecting the men together, and withdrawing. A squadron of the Lothians and Border Horse were covering the withdrawal, but they could not be committed to the valley and had to remain on the high ground to carry out their role; also they could wait for only a limited time, although the squadron leader agreed to stay in position for half an hour longer than was scheduled.

The new positions at Belleville were strong; the Norfolks and Royal Engineers had worked very hard to prepare them. However, the general situation was confused and there was little information of how the battle further south had gone. To add to the confusion a military policeman arrived at "B" Company's position with orders for transmission to Battalion Headquarters that the battalion group must at once take up a line facing south, as they were already outflanked by the enemy. When a search was made for this policeman to have the orders confirmed he could not be found. Fifth Column activity was widespread. Even the French liaison officer attached to the Scots Fusiliers had been sent back to Divisional Headquarters under arrest. He had acted in a suspicious manner, and when with Battalion Headquarters in Flocques had shouted loudly across the village street: "When is the battalion withdrawing tonight?"

At about 3 a.m. on June 9 "A" Company arrived intact at Belleville. Lieutenant Gow had done a fine job. He had succeeded in gathering the entire company and their stores, and with the aid of Pioneers had made his way up the hill, cutting a path through the debris and meeting the yeomanry in the nick of time. "A" Company went into reserve at Bracquemont for a well deserved sleep. For this action and his work throughout the campaign, Lieutenant Gow was Mentioned in Despatches.

Before the withdrawal to Belleville news had come that Platoon Sergeant-Major Franks and his platoon from Ault had made their way through the enemy lines with Major Lorne Campbell of the 7th Argylls and would join the Battalion later. When the Germans overran the 51st Division west of the Bresle, the French gun crew, which it had been Franks' task to cover, surrendered. Franks, however, withdrew with his men to the village of Ault and there met Major Campbell and two corn-panics of the Argylls, who had escaped from being cut off and captured. They banded together under Major Campbell's command, and taking cover by day and marching by night eventually crossed the Bresle and rejoined their units. Platoon Sergeant-Major Franks commanded the rearguard. Major Campbell, who received the Distinguished Service Order for this exploit, spoke highly of Franks and the Fusiliers and recommended the Platoon Sergeant-Major for the Military Medal, which he was awarded.

News reached the British front at about this time that German armoured divisions had broken through at Arras and Amiens. They were heading in a wide sweep for the English Channel at the coast near Abbeville, and would thus cut the lifelines of the northern armies. It was clear that this encircling movement would involve Rouen, the supply base of the 51st Division. Emergency arrangements were immediately made, therefore, to use Le Havre, further down the Seine and nearer home, as a supply centre for ammunition and fuel. Since Le Havre contained no gun ammunition, a last trainload was prepared, to travel north from Rouen; but this never reached the British troops.

For the Fusiliers June 9 was a quiet day and the men got some rest. The Belleville position was strong, with a regiment of gunners in support. The chief danger was the possibility of an

enemy landing behind the lines from the sea, but in the brilliant, clear weather this seemed unlikely.

German tank-supported Panzer divisions were already northeast of Rouen. Thus the only Allied avenue of escape lay westwards over the Seine. The French ordered a retirement to the general area of Bethune. If encirclement was to be avoided the slow rearguard action had to be speeded up. In the event of an enemy swing to the North towards the Channel, the only port available for an Allied evacuation would be Dieppe. However, because of the enemy's rapid approach, blocking vessels were sent to that port and the harbour entrance was sealed off not long before the Germans arrived. The small fishing harbour at St. Valery-en-Caux, 20 miles west of Dieppe, was considered by the Navy unsuitable for evacuation and Le Havre was chosen instead. It had to be defended, and Brigadier A. C. L. Stanley-Clarke, D.S.O. (formerly of the Royal Scots Fusiliers), commanding the 154th Infantry Brigade of the 51st Division, was entrusted with that duty.

6th Bn: *Le Havre*

In the evening of June 9 at Arques-la-Bataille, birthplace of William the Conqueror, orders were issued for a withdrawal to Le Havre. Brigadier Stanley-Clarke's command was created and christened "Ark Force ". It consisted of troops attached to the 51st Division. The Scots Fusiliers were to withdraw to a line at Fécamp, through which would pass the rest of the 51st Division from an intermediate position at St. Valery. The Fusiliers were originally to abandon their position at Belleville at 8.30 p.m., but as the supporting artillery had an assignment in another sector till 10 p.m., Lord Rowallan agreed to remain there as a covering force until 10.15 p.m., although it meant leaving little time to reach the bridge at Dieppe, which was to be blown at 11 a.m.

That evening a patrol of the Lothians and Border Horse found no enemy as far forward as Creil. Taking into account, however, the Germans' likely speed of movement, there was no guarantee that the withdrawal would pass off as smoothly as in fact it did. The passage through the streets and harbour area of Dieppe was slow and complicated, and smoke from burning oil tanks at Rouen formed a black, greasy pall over the town. There was total loss of contact on several occasions. Further, the postponement of the start of the withdrawal had jeopardised the Battalion's chance of reaching the bridge as a complete unit before the hour set for its demolition. The Sapper subaltern responsible for blowing the charges had his orders and needed some persuasion to keep the bridge intact until the last man had crossed the river at 2.15 a.m. on June 10. One man only was left behind, to become a prisoner of war; during a halt he had fallen asleep in a doorway at a street corner. It was impossible to shout or to shout, and after a short but fruitless search he had to be abandoned. Buses were waiting at Apperville to take the Fusiliers to Fécamp, and in due course the convoy started on its way through the smoke along badly crowded roads.

Eric Linklater's book *The Highland Division* conveys perfectly the atmosphere of that move in the following passage: "At night the transport drivers had to navigate a darkness so thick and evil smelling as almost to be palpable. The roads, as they were at all times, were dotted with refugees, and French batteries were also on the move. Ark Force fumbled its way between gross but invisible obstacles and struggled through black confusion to its goal."

The smoke, however, protected this tempting target from the Luftwaffe until it reached Fécamp. One of the Fusiliers' trucks broke down on the way and a party was sent back to recover it. Unfortunately they were caught by an enemy force which had cut off the remainder of the 51st Division at St. Valery and which narrowly missed an even bigger haul. Under command of an officer of the Royal Army Service Corps this party of Fusiliers managed to fight their way out with the loss of only one man, and subsequently reached the beaches where they were evacuated in a destroyer.

The main body of the Battalion was given food and slept by the roadside. Meanwhile Lord Rowallan was instructed to get in touch with an officer of the Argylls, who was reported to be at the St. Valery road fork outside the town. He failed to find this officer, and on his return discovered that the Battalion had been sent out into the country with orders to let the men have a much needed rest. After a search in company with Lieutenant Weir had disclosed no sign of his command, Lord Rowallan was informed that the enemy were now on the cliffs above St. Valery and that the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers were to go to Octreville and there occupy a position in accordance with orders already sent to the Battalion.

At about noon on June 10 Major C. P. R. Johnston reached Ark Force headquarters with the news that the 51st Division was cut off from Le Havre. Brigadier Stanley-Clarke, as prearranged, then made his own plan to meet the changed circumstances and chose for Ark Force a much shorter defence line between Octreville and Montivilliers.

Lord Rowallan was still searching for his Battalion, which he did not find until at ~ p.m. a unit of the Black Watch on its way back reported that the Fusiliers were five miles from Octreville awaiting orders. Lieutenant-Colonel MacPherson, commanding the Black Watch, said that he had advised the 6th Bn to withdraw as the Germans were round their flank; the Fusiliers, however, had decided to hang on a little longer. Unsuccessful attempts were made to get troop-carrying vehicles forward to bring them in. At 7 p.m., however, the Battalion transport and about 200 Fusiliers arrived with information that the remainder were making their way back by Criquetot, but would have to lie up for the night somewhere on the road. The transport was at once unloaded and the stores dumped by the roadside, while the 200 men took up their positions in the new line. As soon as it was ready the transport set off, and luckily met Captain Duncan, who said that the Fusiliers were in a wood on the Greville road. The convoy's only protection was some anti-aircraft trucks mounting Bren guns, but fortunately it encountered no German units. At the wood the Fusiliers climbed aboard the trucks, some 30 men to each vehicle regardless of size and room, and moved back to Octreville, which they reached at 9.50 p.m. The Battalion arrived at its defensive position at 10.30 p.m., after what Lord Rowallan has described as "the worst day I have ever spent".

The line at Octreville was strong, with an adequate number of anti-tank guns. During the night of June 10 there were enemy air attacks on Le Havre which continued throughout June 11. The troops were encouraged, however, by the sight of three Fairey Battlefighters, almost the first British aircraft they had seen. There was no news of the enemy land forces until late that afternoon when Ark Force stood to arms on receiving a report. of German tanks advancing from Fécamp; but no tanks appeared.

6th Bn: The departure from France

June 12 was a peaceful day. All surplus stores were destroyed, as the evacuation of Le Havre was to take place that day and the Royal Navy had insisted on a daylight operation. By 11 p.m. the destruction was complete. As they waited, the Fusiliers witnessed and loudly cheered the performance of nine British Hurricane aircraft, which brought down a party of three German Heinkels making their way to Le Havre, and drove off a large force of enemy bombers and their protecting fighters before a single bomb could be dropped. For the first night for a long time the port area was undisturbed. All transport had been destroyed at the dockside by driving trucks into each other. Lord Rowallan's car, polished till every part shone including the engine, was preserved until the last. Fusilier Hay, its driver, asked that another Fusilier might be made responsible for its destruction, as it was more than he himself could face. Some of the Fusiliers then embarked in the *Amsterdam*, aboard which they had arrived in France so short a time before. the remainder sailed in the *Tynwald*, one of the Isle of Man packets.

On the morning of June 13 the Battalion arrived in Cherbourg. Having disembarked it remained by the quayside until ~ p.m., when it moved to "D" Camp, pending a decision whether it should return to Britain or advance to the defence of Paris in a last effort to stem the enemy tide surging across France. The news that some 6,000 men of the Highland Division had been taken by the Germans added to a general feeling of depression.

The Fusiliers moved from "D" Camp to a bivouac area at the Chateau de Tourlaville, Admiral Darlan's Headquarters, where they slept in the deep woods and spent the day of June 14. In the evening they were put at notice to be ready to move from 2 p.m. on June 15, by rail. At noon on the 15th came a message: "No move in the meantime;" and at 1.40 p.m.: "Move down to quays in rear of 8th Argylls, who will start at 2 p.m. to embark at Horner" (a place about two and a half miles beyond the quay at which they had disembarked). The 6th Bn's war diary records: "When nearly at Horner we were told to go back to the original quay. Finally all on board the *Viking*, crowded but happy. Three bombs dropped behind us as we sailed." The Battalion landed in England at Southampton, and later moved by train to Gales in Ayrshire.

Lord Rowallan has written this tribute to his officers and men. 'Under-equipped, under-armed, with an organisation totally unsuited to the role they were called upon to fulfill, their high sense of purpose and the natural quality of the men themselves, as men, carried them through and earned the tributes paid long afterwards.'

In a letter addressed to Lord Rowallan after the evacuation, Colonel C. P. R. Johnston, Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General of the 51st Division, wrote: "I never heard anything but praise at Divisional Headquarters for the way in which the 6th Bn Royal Scots Fusiliers performed the tasks which they were called upon to undertake. I know also that General Fortune was full of praise for your exploits at Eu, which he mentioned particularly."

Chapter V

MADAGASCAR—1st and 2nd Bn's —1942

Preparation and training—At sea— The landings—The assault on Diego Suarez— The capture of Diego Suarez— Majunga and Tamatave— The advance on Tananarive

THE invasion of Madagascar, although it may now appear as something of a side-show when seen in the perspective of the whole world war, was in the early summer of 1942 an undertaking of the highest importance. Allied occupation of Madagascar was at that time essential for three main reasons: to set a firm limit to Japanese expansion to the West; to remove the threat of a junction of German and Japanese forces; and, most urgent of all, to preserve for the Allies a life-line to the East round the Cape while the Mediterranean route was barred by Italy.

The operation was first named "Bonus ", and subsequently "Ironclad ". A telegram from the Prime Minister to President Roosevelt, who had undertaken to replace with United States naval vessels those British ships detached from the Home Fleet for the task, described the forces assigned to the enterprise as: "two strong well-trained brigades, with a third in case of a check, together with tank-landing craft and two aircraft carriers, as well as a battleship and cruisers." The troops selected were the 29th Independent Brigade and No.5 Commando, both trained in amphibious warfare, and two brigades of the 5th Division, which was bound for India. The 17th Brigade of the 5th Division was to act as the supporting formation in the landing, and the 13th as a reserve. As it turned out, the 13th Brigade was not required to land.

The Commander of the 29th Brigade was Brigadier F. W. Festing, who later commanded the 36th Division in Burma and finally, after holding higher appointments, became Chief of the Imperial General Staff in 1959. "It has been my privilege ", he has written, "to assist in a combined operation which may be described as a complete entity, comprising as it did a planning period, a long sea voyage and the successful capture of a defended fleet base. I understand that it is not an exaggeration to say that an operation of this nature and at this range has not taken place since the period of the Napoleonic wars."

The 29th Independent Brigade consisted of four Battalions: the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel J. F. Armstrong; the 2nd South Lancashire Regiment; the 2nd East Lancashire Regiment; and the 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers. The 17th Brigade of the 5th Division consisted of the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel I. D. MacInnes; the 2nd Northamptonshire Regiment; and the 6th Seaforth Highlanders. The whole land force was under command of Major-General R. G. Sturges, Royal Marines.

The inclusion of the two regular Scots Fusilier Battalions was not disclosed to the Regiment, because of the need for secrecy, until the transports were at sea, and their meeting was deferred until arrival at Durban, where a massed band of the pipes and drums of both Battalions beat *Retreat* to celebrate the occasion.

1st and 2nd Bn's: Preparation and training

The 1st Battalion had already been in India for eight years when Germany invaded the Low Countries. After Dunkirk it was recalled to garrison duty at home. It arrived towards the end of July 1940, moved to Aldershot, was re-formed and reequipped for war and joined the 29th Independent Brigade, then under command of Brigadier Sir Oliver Leese, who later commanded the Eighth Army in Italy from December 1943 to October 1944.

Commanding the Battalion was Lieutenant-Colonel W. E. Clutterbuck, M.C., who subsequently commanded the 1st Division. In October 1940 he was given command of the 10th Brigade, when he was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Armstrong, M.B.E., who was still

in command of the 1st Battalion in Madagascar. The first assignment of the Brigade was a defensive role on the Sussex Downs in the area about Worthing, Steyning and Washington, to which it moved on October 23. This was followed within a fortnight by transfer to a forward position on the beaches of Worthing. Duty on the beaches and in the downs continued until February 1941. Then, as the organisation for defence developed, the unit's role became that of mobile counter-attack. During this period, His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester inspected "A" Company during a tour of the defences; while Lord Trenchard, Colonel of the Regiment, visited the Battalion in November, and again in May of the following year after a warning had been received of impending service overseas. For a year thereafter, however, the Brigade was engaged in training in amphibious warfare.

The 29th Brigade moved to Scotland for this phase of preparation; first to Glasgow and then by sea to Inverary, where Mr. Winston Churchill and the Duke of Argyll were on different occasions observers of their experimental training in combined operations. The Prime Minister was later to refer to his visit in a special congratulatory message to the Brigade after the fall of Diego Suarez. Variations in the study of coastal assault took the Brigade from Argyll to Orkney, where in Scapa Flow on August 10 His Majesty the King watched them take part in "Exercise Spearhead". Thence the Scots Fusiliers moved south to Galashiels to await a call to action which seemed now unlikely to be long deferred.

The winter of 1941/2 in the Border country was spent in very active preparation. There were long night marches, demonstrations of street fighting, and intensive training of junior officers in initiative and isolated command; all in readiness for the Spring. The departure for Madagascar came on March 21 1942.

During the previous week, on March 17, the first intimation that "Operation Ironclad" was to be undertaken reached the 29th Brigade. It was to the effect that "Exercise 19", an amphibious exercise, for which the Brigade had embarked two days previously, had been cancelled. An area had been selected in Fife to which the formation was to have been transferred at the end of "Exercise 19". Thus, when it left Galashiels an admirable "cover" was already in existence. On March 23 the Brigade left the port of Greenock in convoy. Under command of the Brigade also sailed "B" Special Service Squadron of the Royal Armoured Corps, consisting of six Valentine and six light Tetrarch tanks; No.5 Commando; the 455th Independent Light Battery, Royal Artillery; and the 145th Light Anti-Aircraft Troop.

The 2nd Bn had re-formed at Turiff in Aberdeenshire after its tragic losses in Belgium with the British Expeditionary Force in 1940. Its commanding officer in June 1940 was Lieutenant-Colonel R. G. W. Callaghan, in succession to Lieutenant-Colonel W. Tod, M.C., who had been taken prisoner with many of his officers and men in the Battalion's final stand on the Ypres-Comines Canal. Callaghan remained only six months with the Battalion before being promoted to command the 12th Brigade. The vacancy was then filled by Lieutenant-Colonel I. D. MacInnes, who had been second-in-command of the 1st Battalion. at the same time new officers were drafted in from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

The training of the Battalion at this time was chiefly designed to raise it to the standard of a battle-worthy unit. There was a professional leavening in the ranks of survivors from the former 2nd Bn, but the majority of officers and men had been recruited since the outbreak of war. Following a stay at Callander in Perthshire the Battalion moved to Crewe Hall, where Christmas 1940 and the early months of 1941 were spent in continuous training. In April the Battalion

crossed to Ulster and was stationed at Enniskillen on the Eire border. The Fusiliers became so popular with the inhabitants that the local pipe band, on discovering that the Battalion had lost its drums at Dunkirk, insisted on presenting the Battalion pipes and drums with its own set of tenor drums for the duration of the war. The gift was gladly accepted. By the time that they were ceremonially returned in 1947 by a delegation flown from Prestwick Airport, including the Pipe-Major, who played the regimental march-past outside the town hall of Enniskillen, the drums had travelled to South Africa, Madagascar, India, Iraq, Persia, Egypt, Syria, Sicily, Italy, France, Belgium and Germany. In January 1942 the Battalion left for Caterham in Surrey to prepare for service overseas.

An incident which occurred during an inspection of the Battalion by His Majesty King George VI deserves mention. While passing down the ranks the King paused to speak to a Fusilier wearing a Military Medal, which he had won with the Battalion in France in 1940. Expecting to be informed of the engagement for which the decoration had been awarded, the King inquired: "Where did you get this?" To His Majesty's evident surprise the answer was: "From yourself Sir, at Buckingham Palace." The Fusilier had been one of those captured with the remnant of the Battalion in Belgium, but had escaped during the march to a prison camp in Germany. He reached Marseilles where, working as a waiter in a German mess, he contrived to set up an organisation to assist British prisoners to escape. Finally he himself returned to the United Kingdom, to be awarded the Military Medal.

1st and 2nd Bn's: At sea

On March 23, as the 1st Battalion embarked at Greenock in the S.S. *Keren*, the 2nd Bn boarded the S.S. *Oronsay* at Liverpool. Neither Battalion was aware of its destination and had no knowledge of the other's presence in the assembling convoy, "W.S. 17", which was conveying 50,000 troops to the East. The naval escort consisted of the battleship *Ramillies*, the aircraft carriers *Illustrious* and *Indomitable*, cruisers, destroyers, corvettes and minesweepers. This formidable fleet was under the command of Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret, C.B., Commander-in-Chief, Force F., a relative of Lieutenant-Colonel W. M. Syfret who was commanding the 11th Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1940. Both assault commanders, Captain Garnons-Williams, R.N., and Brigadier Festing, with their staffs, were in one ship of the convoy, the 5.8. *Winchester Castle*, where a combined operations room was established. Throughout the whole operation there was complete mutual confidence and co-operation between the Royal Navy and the Army.

The *Oronsay* carried nearly 5,000 troops. In addition to two infantry units, the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers and the Seaforth, a regiment of heavy anti-aircraft artillery was on board; also 17th Brigade Headquarters and various sub-units. "B" Company and Battalion Headquarters of the Fusiliers were least comfortable, travelling on a much reviled lower deck. Conditions were equally cramped in the *Keretz* and other transports. The main concern was to keep the troops interested from day to day and this was done by exercising them in the confined deck spaces, by the provision of reading matter, and by organising daily sweepstakes on the ship's run. As the convoy neared the equator khaki drill uniform replaced battle-dress, which gave some relief, while physical training parades were gradually reduced on the advice of the senior medical officer.

Freetown was reached on April 6, but the troops were not allowed ashore. The hours in port are described in the records as “a busy period of many conferences “. An outline plan of the operation had already been given to commanding officers while at sea. Combined planning was now necessary between the 29th Brigade, which was to lead the assault, and the 17th Brigade, which was to be in support. Rumours about the convoy’s destination multiplied and the “ cover story “ was announced, but the large map hanging in the foyer of the ship assumed an increasingly worn appearance about the island of Madagascar.

The convoy put to sea again, and according to the Battalion records: “Training began now to assume a new importance. Lectures on combined operations were listened to even in the tropical heat. On our ship there were no assault landing craft (ALCs) but practice embarkation and disembarkation were done by means of chalk lines on the upper decks. Even the sports were organised with an eye on training. The main event consisted of an obstacle race in full equipment under the burning sun which entailed scrambling up from the hold over various gangways to’ B’ deck, through lifeboats and under a tarpaulin to the finishing post. Twice a week the pipes and drums beat *Retreat* on deck, to the great delight of other units as well as our own.”

Lieutenant-Colonel Armstrong has some light-hearted recollections of the 1st Battalion’s voyage. He writes: “ One of the difficulties during the long voyage was to retain the hard fitness of everyone—and especially of their feet. This was achieved to a great extent by marching round and round the open decks to the music of the pipes, carrying full kit, a painful and boring proceeding, both to those who participated and those who did not. ‘The Fusiliers Lament’ published in *The Keren Kronicle* gives the average view:

‘Oh five and twenty year’ ago
Ah jined the Twenty-Wan,
Ah’d tartan roon’ ma hurdies
Like a bonny fechtin’ man;

But noo Ah’m wearing khaki shorts
An’ sailin’ on the sea—
Ah never thocht Ah’d sodger
In the King’s Navee.’
[and so on]”

A call at Durban was essential. The *Keren*, in which the 1st Battalion had sailed, was already trimmed for operations, since the departure from Galashiels ostensibly for” Exercise 19 “had been superseded by orders to take part in “Operation Ironclad “; but the *Oronsay*, which had carried the 2nd Bn from Liverpool, had been loaded in the normal way, and the adjustment of stores and equipment for an assault landing required both time and the provision of a labour force.

A member of the 2nd Bn writes:

“On April 22 the convoy sailed into the harbour of Durban. The day that the Battalion arrived in port the Union Government had broken off diplomatic relations with Vichy France and, naturally enough, the chief anxiety of the South Africans was on account of Madagascar. All this excitement and the knowledge of the South Africans as to where we were bound served to

accentuate the welcome given to all convoys. The majority of the citizens appeared to be Scottish and not a few were from Ayrshire. So we were given a royal welcome and entertained with unbelievable hospitality. The massed bands of the 1st and 2nd Bns played on the seafront to huge audiences and were mobbed by excited fans at the end of the performances. The Scots Fusiliers, spotless in new K.D. and with specially cleaned glengarries, were extremely popular in the town.

“It was with regret that we sailed from Durban. It had been very pleasant and we were the better Battalion for it. We sailed about noon with the pipes and drums playing the traditional *Black Bear*. No sooner had we left the quay than we were told officially of Madagascar, and a broadcast from the captain of the ship gave us full information. In the days that followed we were preparing for the landing; morale was at its highest; ammunition was issued and checked; the landing tables were studied. The sorting of platoons into assault landing craft loads finally convinced us. So, after speeches from the Brigadier and the Colonel, having written letters home and generally got ready, we went to our hammocks in the *Oronsay* for the last time.

This was the night of May 4 1942.

1st Bn: The landing

The coastline about the northernmost tip of Madagascar differs distinctly from that surrounding the rest of the island, which is more even. The Andrakaka Peninsula at the island's extremity is shaped like an arrowhead, the neck of which forms an isthmus of land deeply indented on each side by the sea. On the west side is Courrier Bay, and on the east Diego Suarez Bay, both of which were of importance in the assault. Courrier Bay faces the Mozambique Channel; Diego Suarez Bay the Indian Ocean. The latter is a magnificent anchorage enclosed by two pincers of land. The upper claw stretches down from the arrowhead almost to meet the lower, which is formed by the nose of the Orangea Peninsula pushing up from the main mass of the island. This leaves a narrow entrance channel, made more difficult of access by a small island. On one peninsula stood the town and naval establishment of Antsirane, which in 1942 had a population of 30,000.

The natural defences of the harbour entrance had been admirably turned to account. North and south, heavy batteries and searchlights had been installed. Antsirane contained the barracks of the 2nd Regiment Mixte de Madagascar, consisting of trained personnel, French, Senegalese and Malagasy. The best chance of a successful assault on Diego Suarez with minimum loss seemed to lie in a combined operation from the western side of the isthmus, rather than by attempting to force the well-protected eastern channel. Attack from the west entailed the seizure of the beaches at Courrier Bay followed by a rapid march across twenty miles of rough country to reach the landward defences of Antsirane. A simultaneous drive up the west coast from the same landing places was planned, with the aim of subduing the defences on Diego Suarez Peninsula and so threatening the town from the rear. To conceal these intentions from the French some diversions were arranged. These included air attacks on the shipping in the anchorage, which was known to include two armed merchantmen and seven submarines; the bombing of Artachart airfield, south of Antsirane, followed by the dropping of dummy paratroops; and a naval bombardment of the Orangea Peninsula.

Courrier Bay, with a long stretch of shore, and Ambararata Bay, smaller and to the south, were chosen as most suitable for the landings. Although the approaches were not easy, because of

islands and coral reefs, there was deep water for large ships, while the beaches themselves offered reasonable access to the interior. The indifferent state of the defences was encouraging. No. 5 Commando was given the task of overpowering some batteries on a promontory at the north of Courrier Bay, known as "Windsor Castle ". It was then to strike swiftly northwards across country to capture Diego Suarez. The 29th Independent Brigade was to land on two beaches in Ambararata Bay, and press on through the mangrove swamps across the base of the isthmus to Antsirane, dealing with any opposition encountered on the way.

When the beaches had been firmly secured it was intended to despatch a radio message from Admiral Syfret to the French commander, declaring the British occupation of the island to be in the common interest of both France and the Allied powers and offering assurances of friendship and respect, in the hope that this might obviate the need for bloodshed.

In darkness on the morning of May 5, navigation lights placed on shore by crews of the pathfinding cutter *Lindi* guided the convoy, preceded by the minesweepers, towards Madagascar; the time was 2.40 a.m. The accomplishment of the landward approach without mishap or alarm to the shore watch was a brilliant feat of planning and navigation in dangerous and mined waters. Not a vessel was a ship's length out of position. The naval management of the approach, combined with a false sense of security on the part of the French, achieved the surprise essential to the success of the plan. The French were convinced that successful landings in darkness were out of the question on this treacherous, reef-infested coast; the commandos found the garrison gunners asleep. At 5.30 a.m. the landing craft, filled with British troops and escorted by corvettes, made for the shore. The naval guns opened fire and bomb-laden planes of the Fleet Air Arm took off from the decks of the carriers on the short run to Diego Suarez Bay and Artachart airfield.

The attacks by the Fleet Air Arm on the airfield and port went in at dawn after five minutes warning. At Artachart several direct hits were scored on the hangars with heavy bombs and incendiaries. Three Potez 63 twin-engined bombers, two Potez 25 biplanes, five of the latest type of Morane fighter and a civilian aircraft were destroyed. Later in the day four Morane fighters from Tananarive were brought down in air combat while attempting to bomb and machine-gun the beaches and the French set fire to three more when they landed damaged at Artachart. The French thereafter were deprived of air support. In the harbour and round the coast the Fleet Air Arm sank enemy shipping, including a submarine.

"In every case ", Brigadier Festing wrote of the landings "the correct beaches were found by landing craft flotillas at the correct time. At Red Beach No. 5 Commando and one company of the 2nd Lancashire Regiment surprised No.7 Coast Defence Battery and pushed on meeting with little opposition. No. 8 Coast Defence Battery, about which there had always been some doubt, was found to be non-existent, but an enemy post existed at the pinnacle of ' Windsor Castle', and the complete eviction of the defenders of this post was not accomplished until the morning of D 2, and then only after it had been bombarded by naval gunfire. The defenders made good use of the 4 precipitous nature of the approach and defended themselves with grenades."

The 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers set off from the transports for Green Beach in Ambararata Bay at 2.27 a.m. The first man landed at 4.32 a.m., only two minutes after zero hour. Few men in leaving the landing craft got wet above the knees; most landed dryshod. "C" Company quickly formed a perimeter with one platoon, but finding no sign of opposition sought an exit through swamp and mangrove to the Antsirane road, 600 yards from the shore. Colonel Armstrong waited for "D" Company; then the two companies and the Battalion reconnaissance group pushed inland

along a loose, dusty track. The pace was rapid and tiring, as no vehicles had yet been landed and everything had to be manhandled—machine guns, ammunition, equipment, rations and other normal requirements for operations and maintenance to suffice for over 48 hours. The Commanding Officer was anxious to press forward but decided to rest the men for ten minutes. The specialist elements, such as signallers and the 3-inch mortar and protective platoons, were finding the rate of movement over-strenuous. The decision to rest even briefly was hard to make, as speed was essential in order to ensure surprise in the attack. The respective times of arrival of the Welch Fusiliers from White Beach and the Scots Fusiliers from Green Beach at the crossing of the track from the beach and an ill-conditioned road which ran between the villages of Ambararata and Mangoky, were to determine the relative positions of the two Battalions in the ensuing advance and their tasks; to the Battalion which reached the crossing first would be assigned the role of marching straight on Antsirane, while the other was to be given the secondary task of seizing and holding Artachart airfield, some five miles south of the town. The distance from White Beach was the shorter and the Welch Fusiliers won the race, but only by a short head. In the event, by nightfall both units were fighting hard in the trenches before the town.

1st Bn: *The assault on Diego Suarez*

The march from the crossroads began. A hot sun blazed down on the Anamakia Plain, which stretches between Courrier Bay and Diego Suarez Bay. The plain was half-desert, half-veldt, covered with high brown grass which was broken by green arable clearings; there were rocks and occasional sandy mounds on which grew cactus. A loose-surfaced, broken road crossed this dry wilderness, passing through two primitive villages and some rocky defiles. Its contours and natural growth made the country ideal for ambush or sniping. The only possible observation point, apart from aircraft, was one spur, undiscovered at the time, rising to the west of Col de Bonne Nouvelle, at which the enemy staged his first delaying action. But so far no shot had been fired. The invasion appeared to leave the peasants unmoved. As the columns passed, some raised their hats; indeed, the first native encountered muttered “good morning” in passable English before shuffling on his way.

At about 9.30 a.m. a French naval officer and three ratings were captured by the Welch Fusiliers in the area of the Salt Pans. These lay west of Anamakia village on the Ambararata - Antsirane road where it skirted the southern shore of Diego Suarez harbour, ten miles from Courrier Bay and six from Con Barriquand, the point at which the rocky road turned abruptly north into the peninsula on which Antsirane was built. The naval officer was handed a letter from Admiral Syfret to the Governor of Antsirane and sent back to the town in his own car. This letter apparently had some influence on the events which followed.

The message it contained was from “those forces which are fighting to restore freedom in the world and secure the liberation of France and French territory”, and asked for the unconditional surrender of Diego Suarez” that bloodshed may be avoided “. It went on to give assurances that the Allies did not covet an inch of French territory; that the naval base would remain French and be restored after the war; and added an undertaking that colonial salaries and pensions would be honoured, repatriation to metropolitan France conceded, and trade restored.

At French headquarters in Antsirane, however, the military governor had no doubt where his duty lay. He would fight. He had already spurned previous British overtures, declaring he would "defend the town to the last". But so far he had no definite information about the direction of the attack. His perplexity had been deepened by the successful diversions at Diego Suarez and Artachart airfield. A decision on how best to employ the forces at his disposal was therefore suspended until he could be sure of the true direction of the threat. The fact that the French did not commit the weight of their forces forward of the main defensive position covering Antsirane would suggest that the return of the officer with the Commander-in-Chief's letter must have convinced the Governor that the danger was coming from the west. At any rate, he despatched light delaying forces into the Anamakia Plain to gain time while he organised his principal resistance on the prepared defences south of the town.

The French screen, probing forward, made contact with the 29th Brigade before midday. A pause to clear an obstacle cost the invaders valuable time and helped to provide the French with the respite they required; while the rough road, the heat and the lack of vehicles together reduced the speed of movement. Further, the small scale maps used were inaccurate. The Brigade Commander subsequently remarked in his report on the operation that it was a pity his force had not been furnished with excellent French maps which could have been purchased for five francs.

The advancing carriers of the Welch Fusiliers encountered their first serious check at 11.15 a.m., coming under fire from positions along the Col de Bonne Nouvelle. This was a strong outpost, with dugouts and machine gun emplacements. Two companies were sent round the flanks to dislodge the enemy and more troops called forward. Meanwhile two heavy tanks and one light tank had arrived at Anamakia village and were brought up to engage the machine gun posts. The nature of the countryside made it difficult for the tanks to engage the defenders, who lay low until they had passed and then reopened fire on the attacking infantry. At the foot of the Col the Brigadier and Brigade Major were caught in this fire and had to dismount from their carrier and take cover hurriedly behind a bank. It was not until 4.15 p.m., when four more heavy tanks arrived and the Welch Fusiliers went in with the bayonet, that the ridge was taken at a cost of two officers killed and other casualties.

The invaders' imperfect knowledge of the area, and lack of exact intelligence about the siting and disposition of the defences, now led to further trouble. The two leading heavy tanks had pushed on beyond Col de Bon Nouvelle and its then unsubdued defences, and were joined by three light tanks. At about 12.30 p.m. near Point 48, beyond Con Rosina and due north of Con Barriquand, they shot up a lorry containing a machine gun. Almost immediately afterwards they were shelled by French 75-millimetre guns firing down the Antsirane road and using solid shot. Although not aware of it at the time, they had entered the field of fire of the main defences. A tank versus field gun engagement opened, which was the prelude to one and a half days of heavy fighting in which both the 29th and 17th Brigades became involved.

The French 75s wrought havoc from the start. The leading tank was hit and the driver killed, while the tank containing the squadron commander was struck and rolled forward 150 yards down the road until shattered by volleys from both right and left. The Tetrarchs behind advanced with great gallantry, but following their squadron commander along the road instead of deploying. The first two were struck and caught fire. In one the tank commander was killed and the gunner so severely burned that he subsequently died. The commander of the second Tetrarch, completely disregarding the fire from 75s, machine guns and rifles, jumped from his tank and

pulled the Bren gun from its anti-aircraft mounting. He then led the unwounded among the crews, armed with a machine gun, a Bren and ammunition taken from one of the tanks, into dismounted action. An attempt was made to stalk the 75s on the tight, but failed in the face of concentrated fire. The French, sallying out from their defences, made three encircling attacks on the tank crews' position, with skilful use of cover. They were successfully held off until, at 3.45 p.m., with one of the tank officers fatally wounded and ammunition almost exhausted, the party was captured. The day ended with the British tank force reduced to one Valentine and three Tetrarchs.

At Col de Bonne Nouvelle the two committed companies of the Welch Fusiliers were reorganised and reinforced by the other companies. All units of the 29th Brigade had been disembarked. The Scots Fusiliers, now at full strength with carriers, were immediately in rear of the Welch Fusiliers. The East Lancashires were still moving up, a company short. The South Lancashires, after acting as floating reserve, were ashore and moving forward. At about 3 p.m. the Scots Fusiliers, to be followed as soon as possible by the South Lancashires, were ordered to move through the Welch Fusiliers to continue the advance. During this period the sniping became intense, but marksmanship was poor and casualties few. The Scots Fusiliers had moved along the road from the Salt Pans to Anamakia. Battalion Headquarters covered the three miles in just over an hour. The Commanding Officer and his Order Group had climbed a ridge to observe the attack on Col de Bonne Nouvelle. Later they went forward in carriers to join the Brigadier and Colonel Stockwell, commanding the Welch Fusiliers. Arrangements were then made to send the Scots Fusiliers through the Welch Fusiliers. After a further review of p0551-bilities "C" Company of the Scots Fusiliers, commanded by Major A. G. Johnston, was ordered forward. The surviving tanks took the lead, under Captain Palmer, with the task of drawing the fire of the 75S. The only available detachment of mortars was sent with "C" Company to lay down a smoke screen for the tanks. The Battalion record comments:

"Only about half an hour of daylight was left as Major Johnston moved forward with one platoon (Lieutenant Thompson) on the left of the Antsirane road and two platoons on the right. The artillery were unable to assist owing to the difficulty of finding a position for an observation post, a problem which impeded operations to the end. The country was now level in front and appeared to slope slightly down to the enemy position, with another small ridge in between. It was partly grassland and partly cultivation. The attack went in at about 1750 hours, which was sunset.

"Lieutenant Thompson with his platoon on the left soon ran into difficulties and suffered a number of casualties before going a hundred yards. This flank was very open and swept by machine guns and sniping fire. Lieutenant Thompson himself was twice wounded. The platoon had to withdraw, as it was considered that to go forward without support was useless. Lieutenant Thompson went back to the regimental aid post to have his wounds dressed but insisted on going forward to his platoon again and remaining with them until they were ordered back. On the right of the road the two platoons made little progress, but reached the anti-tank ditch where they were held up. Meanwhile, 'D' Company in close support of 'C' Company and ready to exploit any success, moved round to the right flank but were met by heavy machine gun fire. By this time it was dark. Just before this... 'B' Company sent out a fighting patrol led by the Company Commander which... suffered a good many casualties. Later, 'A' Company with the C.O. tried to push round the right flank but were held up and returned in approximately an hour. The C.O. reported personally to Brigade, then returned to try to find platoons reported to be missing from

‘D’ Company. He got to the anti-tank ditch and was able to bring two wounded Fusiliers in.... Owing to darkness, the speed with which the attack had been launched, and the lack of reconnaissance, there was a certain amount of confusion and lack of information as to the situation. The British commander was becoming aware that he was confronted with a highly-organised position, efficiently manned.... It was decided that the Battalion should remain where it was for the night and fighting patrols were sent out at intervals to maintain contact.”

The first day of the invasion was over, and Diego Suarez was still French territory. Nevertheless surprise had been achieved and the foundations laid for ultimate success. By 3 p.m. the men of No. 5 Commando had taken Diego Suarez North and diplomatically hoisted the Tricolour as well as the Union Jack on the flagstaff at the summit of the 300-foot crag above the anchorage; but they had been unable to find boats to ferry them across the two miles of bay to Antsirane. They lay in the rear of the French defences, and later constituted a menace to the garrison. With all the ground between the beaches of Courtier and Ambararata Bays as well as the eastern seaboard at their command, the 29th Brigade, exhausted and thinned by casualties, was containing the French on the Antsirane and Orangea peninsulas while fresh means of overcoming the enemy resistance were being planned. No signs of weakening nor lack of vigilance were evident at present in the conduct of the defence; but the presence of a fully-equipped British brigade in reserve, the power of heavy naval armament, not yet fully deployed, and monopoly of the air obviously made the end certain. Despite their steadiness and courage it was thought that the French would not be able to hold out if the pressure against them was maintained. With this in mind fighting patrols penetrated deeply and energetically into the defences throughout the night. It was an exhausting night for the Scots Fusiliers. The first of the fighting patrols was sent out at about 2 a.m., personally led by the Commanding Officer and Captain Coulter.

The 29th Brigade were now up against the fortifications of Antsirane. Brigadier Festing, in a retrospective study of the operation, writes: “There would appear to be a tendency when collecting information about possible theatres of operation to concentrate on the study of such things as personalities of army commanders, political undercurrents and such information as is available from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Baedeker*. The information of most value to an assault commander is the information about *military installations and defences and numbers and calibres of troops.*”

The Antsirane barrier was by no means new, having been designed by General Joffre in 1903. The defences straddled the neck of the Antsirane peninsula from shore to shore two miles below the port itself. Beyond Con Barriquand the line rested to the east on “Scotch Bay” and to the west on “Welsh Pool “, which were indentations formed in the anchorage by extensions of the peninsula. The line was 6,000 yards long and consisted of a continuous trench system with formidable forts, Caimans on the western extremity and Bellevue to the east, overlooking the shore on each flank. This trench system was studded with 75-millimetre gun emplacements, its major armament, with pill-boxes mounting mortars and machine guns, and well sited observation posts; all in concrete. Good use had been made of camouflage to supplement the natural concealment afforded by tall crops, swathes of sugar cane and occasional trees. The pinpointing of targets from the air proved extremely difficult; from the ground it was never achieved. Although on a ridge, the barrier was defiladed from the south by a second ridge of equal height. In the valley between these ridges a lower spine ran parallel to them, giving added protection

from view. The defence had observation over the three roadways entering the peninsula from Ambararata, from the Orangea peninsula, and from Sakarany to the south, and could bring heavy fire to bear upon them. The Sakarany road dropped below the surrounding level as it climbed the last ascent, making the scattered rocks, crops and trees near its verges ideal for the positioning of snipers.

One of the most effective features of the barrier was an anti-tank ditch, in which the Scots Fusiliers were already fighting along its entire length. The distance of this ditch from the main defences was estimated during the battle at various ranges from 600 yards upwards, but was found after fighting had ceased to be actually 1,400 yards. The ditch was 7 feet 6 inches deep and approximately of equal width. It was never penetrated by the tanks after their first encounter on the road, but remained a trap for infantry. Once in it they were unable to emerge again without ladders, of which they had none, or by digging a ramp, which would have been a suicidal enterprise under intense and accurate fire. This ditch largely accounted for the initial failure of the 29th Brigade to break down the defence. Any force entering it was immobilised and robbed of observation.

The plan which was now made to attack the enemy in their main position at dawn was bold and enterprising. Orders reached the Scots Fusiliers at 2.30 a.m. on May 6. The 2nd South Lancashires were to move silently under cover of darkness round the enemy's left flank where it rested on the shore of Scotch Bay. This meant using the Antsirane-Orangea road which skirted the coastline and taking to the rocky foreshore. At first light the South Lancashires were to take the defences in rear and at the same time the Scots Fusiliers on the right and the East Lancashires on the left were to attack the defences frontally up the Antsirane-Ambararata road. A full-scale air bombardment of the enemy positions by aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm, operating from the carriers in Courier Bay, was to precede the attack. The Scots Fusiliers were to attempt to ease forward if possible during the bombing. The Welch Fusiliers were instructed to enter the battle with carriers and the remaining tanks and, if the attacks went well, to push through to Antsirane. Zero hour was 5.30 a.m., when the first gleam of dawn was expected. From 4 a.m. to 5 a.m. the Scots Fusiliers and East Lancashires were to send out noisy patrols to divert attention from the activities of the South Lancashires, who should then be approaching the rear of the defences from the direction of a cemetery on the outskirts of Antsirane. General Sturges sent this signal to his troops: "Speed and savage hearts in the attack. Tolerance in victory."

"A fierce heath fire", in the words of Brigadier Festing, "raged round the Brigade's perimeter during the night but there was no enemy shelling and little sniping. At 0300 hours 455 Light Battery advanced to take up position to support the dawn attack on the left of the road behind the Scama Meat Factory. At Diego Suarez North, 'A' Battery, 9 Field Regiment had moved up on the northern axis in course of the night. During this march they were bombarded by the French sloop *D'Entrecasteux*. Some French marines landed from the sloop and managed to recapture a few points on the Andrakaka Peninsula but were later rounded up." The sloop was set on fire by aircraft from *Indomitable* and later by the destroyer *Laforey*: she was beached and survived the war.

The Scots Fusiliers breakfasted at 2 a.m. At the same hour the South Lancashires, in three columns fifty yards apart, moved over to the coast road in their attempt to turn the enemy's left flank. The rate of advance was slow but contact was preserved. When the shore was reached, the Battalion wheeled north in two columns. The men of the right column crawled over the rocks in

single file and killed two of the enemy in the mangroves. The left column on the west of the road made faster progress and deployed in comparatively open country. From this point they passed out of wireless communication with Brigade, and at zero hour did not carry out their role of attacking the main defences in rear. The success of their out-flanking movement, if it could have been known at Brigade Headquarters, might have altered the whole conduct of the dawn attack. Nevertheless, the havoc they wrought in the enemy's rearward organisation contributed to the final disintegration of the French resistance.

The Scots Fusiliers moved up to the anti-tank ditch at about 3 a.m., "D" and "B" Companies leading on the right and left flanks respectively. They were placed in the lead because they were more familiar with the area than other companies. "A" Company was in rear of "D" Company and "C" in rear of "B" Company, with which were the 3-inch mortars. Battalion Headquarters moved with "A" Company. By 5.30 a.m., zero hour, the entire Battalion was well forward waiting for the end of the air bombardment. Although the air attack was carried out with great determination, the aircraft straightening out almost at ground level, this did not appear to have much effect on the garrison. Further, the defences remained undisturbed by any intervention from the rear by the South Lancashires. The Fusiliers consequently came under heavy fire from the start, and quickly found themselves in an exposed position in the open a few hundred yards from the enemy. Casualties mounted rapidly. There seemed no prospect of further progress against such formidable opposition in the absence of adequate artillery support, which could not be given because the local topography denied observation. The Battalion was therefore ordered to retire to its original start line. The East Lancashires joined in the withdrawal after a determined attack with their carrier platoon which ended only when five carriers had been lost through accurate fire from the enemy's 755. The French were fighting stoutly and their emplaced guns appeared to be masters of the situation. It was feared that a counter-attack might be launched and the reserve Battalion, the Welch Fusiliers, was brought up to La Scama factory, but was not required.

"The determination of all ranks to get through", says the record, "was magnificent. There were many stories of frustrated attempts.... All officers and non-commissioned officers who had spent the night forward were ceaseless in their efforts to help the wounded and get them water. The whole area in which the Battalion found itself at daylight was swept by fire and any movement was at once detected by snipers. The Commanding Officer went forward from 'A' Company, with which he had been moving up, to see Major Delano-Osborne, who had been wounded but had insisted on carrying on until he was again wounded. Captain Mitchell, the second-in-command of the company, was also wounded (later killed) as were 50 per cent of the company. Second-Lieutenant W. S. Powrie, the mortar officer, who had been untiring in his efforts to get the 3-inch mortars forward, actually managed to lodge a detachment within 200 yards of the anti-tank ditch and had selected an excellent position, when he was killed while carrying ammunition forward. This mortar detachment had scored a direct hit on one machine gun post in the first three rounds. The non-commissioned officers of the mortar platoon were beyond praise.... In the circumstances, and again, since he was without support, the Commanding Officer judged, after consultation with Major Delano-Osborne, that further attempts to move forward would lead to undue loss of life and would not achieve success. It was therefore decided to withdraw. This was done about 0630 hours. Only about 120 of the Battalion got back in the first instance and they went into a defensive perimeter behind the ridge from which they had started.... After reporting to Brigade, the Commanding Officer, Captain Coulter, Captain Evetts

and many volunteer Fusiliers went forward . . . to get back the remnants of the Battalion. This they eventually succeeded in doing. On one of these patrols the Commanding Officer was knocked unconscious by the burst of a 75-millimetre shell and brought round by his batman.”

Some of the Fusiliers penetrated so deeply into the defensive system that they were obliged to remain for the day. Sergeant Knox of “D” Company returned to Battalion Headquarters 24 hours later, just in time to be picked up in a carrier for the victorious ride into Antsirane. Knox was near Lieutenant Powrie when he was killed. His story, in his own words, was that “orders were to push forward and occupy the ridge.

... We got the ridge but were pinned down by enemy fire. We had lost several men wounded by shell-fire. Lieutenant Wright (commanding 16 Platoon, ‘D’ Company) and five others crawled forward to a shell hole. During this time Corporal Goodall was wounded. We found him and dragged him with us .. “. (Here Knox tells of the mortar incident previously mentioned.) “At this point the Company Commander sent out an order for us to withdraw to the valley behind and work round to the right flank but this message was never received as the runner was wounded. We tried several times to get out of our position but every time the snipers were too hot for us, so we then decided to wait till darkness and got successfully back at 2100 hours.”

A man who was left for dead, Sergeant English of the carrier platoon, recounts that he and two gunners went forward with “B” Company and immediately came into action. “We came under heavy machine gun fire from two posts and were pinned to the ground. One of these posts was silenced and we pushed forward 500 yards and were fired on, either by a 75-millimetre or mortar.... I was hit on the steel helmet by something heavy and knocked out. Fusilier Docherty and Fusilier Bell went forward but both were wounded and made their way back to Battalion Headquarters, where they reported that I had been killed. When I recovered consciousness I searched for the other two but could not find them, but found the Bren and made my way to the rear company, ‘D’.”

“B” Company was the leading company on the left flank and crossed the start line at 0520 hours just as the air bombardment finished. The first 300 yards were uneventful, although snipers were active with machine guns on the left flank. As the company moved on the fire thickened, especially on the right, and there were considerable casualties. The company swung slightly left and came across some small huts, from which the enemy opened fire. The leading section dealt with these effectively with grenades, and the company pushed on over the second ridge under very heavy fire, including shelling by 75-millimetre guns. The reserve platoon then moved forward and to the left to support the movement of the other two platoons from that flank. At that point it lost contact with the other two platoons. Slightly beyond the second ridge, near a bend in the road, the company ran into heavy cross-fire from machine guns. Sergeant Coull was badly wounded by shrapnel from a 75-millimetre gun, but managed to drag himself back over the ridge. About 10 men were left in that area and the remainder pushed forward but were pinned down by heavy mortar fire, casualties occurring every minute.

The War Diary, opposite the entry “ 0600 hours “, observes: ‘A’ and ‘C’ Companies had managed to get back fairly successfully and went into a defensive perimeter, in co-operation with the East Lancashire Regiment, just below the crest. The Commanding Officer went to Brigade Headquarters and reported the situation which did not appear very satisfactory. The Brigadier decided that nothing further could be done as the Brigade by that time was getting exhausted and

had had a number of casualties and the arrival of the 17th Brigade (including the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers) was to be awaited.”

One remarkable episode during the dawn attack concerns Second-Lieutenant P. B. Reynier, who had moved forward with his men in the darkness. At dawn Reynier found himself deep in the defences armed only with a hand grenade. Instead of taking cover he advanced and pitched the grenade at the slit of one of the gun emplacements. The opening was protected by wire netting against just such an eventuality and the grenade bounded back, wounding Reynier, who received other wounds and was captured. This act of personal bravery won for him the Military Cross. The documents recommending the award included the rare feature of a citation from the enemy. This was conveyed in a letter from the French to the “Commandant” of the Scots Fusiliers, written by a Lieutenant Bande of the 3rd Company, 2nd Madagascar Mixed Regiment. It told how the French officer and a section of machine-gunners were occupying the battlement of a 75-millimetre gun emplacement on the Placers Road, when a lookout reported one of the enemy (Reynier) approaching the gun rampart. “A rifle shot hit the man “, wrote Bande, “when he was several yards from the breastworks and a grenade which he was holding went off. The wounded man spoke French very well. He was hurt in the mouth by a bullet and wounded in the arm. The only arms he had was one hand grenade. He told us, and it is certainly the truth, that he had wanted to carry out an assault on the gun and open the path for your men. That action is one of a brave man. I believe I can tell you that, for you can be certain the French can pick one out.”

A conference was held at 9.30 a.m. by the Military Commander, Major-General Sturges, with the brigade commanders, Brigadier Festing, 29th Brigade, and Brigadier G. W. B. Tarleton, 17th Brigade, at which it was decided that, since stalemate had been reached, an attack should be made that night by all available troops of the 17th Brigade, to be followed up by the 29th Brigade. From noon onwards, in preparation, air bombardment of Antsirane, naval bombardment of the Orangea peninsula and the shelling of the defences from Diego Suarez North were intensified.

Although the situation as a whole was temporarily static, there was considerable activity in and around the defences. In the area of Robinson Hotel, which was highly congested, the sniping was continuous and deadly. In and near the anti-tank ditch, to which elements of the Scots Fusiliers and other Battalions were confined by well-observed mortar and machine gun fire, it was equally unhealthy. With its Battalions weakened and dispersed, the 29th Brigade’s task of containing the enemy until the arrival of the reinforcing brigade was a serious test of endurance. The spirit in which the task was carried out is illustrated by an incident which took place in the anti-tank ditch. No. 3134095 Fusilier Bunyan of No.5 Section of 13 Platoon of “C” Company of the Scots Fusiliers, posthumously recommended for the Victoria Cross, was sitting in the ditch with Corporal Bell, a section commander of the same platoon, when a grenade landed between them. Bunyan grabbed the grenade and shouted: “Look out, boys.” Everyone took cover. The grenade exploded, wounding Bunyan severely in the side and blowing off his foot. When he died there was no doubt in the minds of his comrades that Bunyan had given his life to save theirs.

The first signs of deterioration in the defence became apparent in the afternoon of May 6, during which heavy air and naval bombardments were carried out. Making a personal reconnaissance about 3.30 p.m. Brigadier Festing came to the conclusion that the French effort was slackening, and ordered his leading Battalions to send out fighting patrols. The carriers drew less fire than previously, and 50 prisoners were captured by the Scots Fusiliers, the majority by “A” Company. A patrol by the surviving tanks effected even greater penetration, and there was a

general shifting forward of positions as dusk approached. Some of the enemy, including concealed snipers, remained in their positions. At about 5.10 p.m. some French mortar batteries reacted sharply, with the result that Battalion Headquarters of the Scots Fusiliers was heavily bombed and 2 Fusiliers were killed and 12 persons wounded, including the Second-in-Command and the Adjutant. A little later the Scots Fusiliers were given orders for the forthcoming night attack. At 10 p.m. the 17th Brigade was to pass the start line, which was 300 yards beyond the sunken road. The Battalion was to ensure that the ground in front was clear of the enemy. Two patrols, commanded by Captain J. E. Ray and Lieutenant Souter, were to occupy the far side of the road, where there was thick cover, while on the near side 10 Fusiliers wearing celanese triangles were to be posted at 30 yard intervals to mark the start line.

News of the South Lancashires, who had disappeared round the enemy's left flank the previous night, now reached the 29th Brigade. Although unable to fulfill their role in the dawn attack, they had embarked upon a course of sabotage and intimidation which contributed towards the collapse of the defence. One company, moving up the coast road, had cleared mortar and machine gun posts with the bayonet and pushed on to capture some barracks near the town, taking 50 prisoners. This company, which was separated from the rest of the Battalion, organised itself into guerilla bands. One of these bands released the horses and mules of 75-millimetre gun teams and stampeded them behind the French lines. One of the other companies reached a village south of Antsirane, where it cut telephone wires and ambushed vehicles carrying water, petrol and ammunition. This company watched parties of native troops falling back from the line on May 6 and saw enemy flag cars apparently in flight, but because of the failure of the wireless sets this valuable information could not be sent back to Brigade. Another company stationed itself on the road behind the enemy trenches, but finally withdrew having already taken 95 prisoners and killed 30 of the enemy. The most daring enterprise was led by a subaltern who took a patrol within 50 yards of Bellevue Fort, beside the Orangea Road, demanding its surrender, which was refused, and then persuaded the French gunners to allow his party 10 minutes in which to withdraw. Another platoon eventually collected some 250 prisoners from various posts, some of which had already surrendered. When the Battalion was concentrated on the evening of May 6 at Robinson Hotel it had been reduced by casualties and missing men to 10 officers and 140 other ranks. The disorganisation in the defences, which the South Lancashires had done much to produce, was in an advanced state when the 17th Brigade entered the field. It is not clear whether a specific order to evacuate was given by the French. If so, it could not have been generally received, for although the roadway was forced by the 17th Brigade, there was still stubborn fighting even in the absence of a cohesive defence. Snipers remained in their posts at isolated points, and some of the pill-boxes still offered firm resistance and refused to give in.

2nd Bn: The landing

The 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers with the 17th Brigade had remained on board the *Oronsay*, assembled on the mess decks from 5.30 a.m., while the 29th Brigade and the Commandos carried out their landings. They crowded round the radio sets on deck to hear news of the 1st Battalion from the island. Not long after zero hour an excited Fusilier of "D" Company relayed (in his own words) the astonishing message: "Mangoky has fell." A glance at the map showed that Mangoky was a small village on the road to Antsirane, more than an hour's march from the beaches. When

the 2nd Bn eventually followed the route taken by the 1st, there was great curiosity about the village of Mangoky. The Commanding Officer had gone ahead with his Order Group and the Battalion was led into the area described on the map as Mangoky by the Second-in-Command, Major J. V. Bailey. But there was no sign of a village. Puzzled, Bailey scoured the countryside in search of this elusive place, and finally concluded that two hen-houses which the Battalion had passed by the wayside must indeed have been dignified by the title of Mangoky.

The landing of the 2nd Bn at 2.30 p.m. on May 5, after the main body of the 29th Brigade had disappeared through the mangrove, had moments of excitement. A corvette struck a mine and sank, and one landing craft overturned. A ferry to the shore was maintained through high-running seas. The first sub-unit to land was “B” Company on Red Beach in Courrier Bay, with orders to take over the four guns and prisoners captured in “Windsor Castle” from No. 5 Commando. The battery position still concealed some hidden enemy, who fired on the company with mortars as it was disembarking from the landing craft. H.M. destroyer *Laforey*, of the escort, responded with a sharp bombardment and the French raised a white flag. This proved to be a ruse, and when one of the Commandos went in to take possession he was treacherously killed—the only incident of its kind during the invasion. When the position was finally occupied on May 6 the garrison had withdrawn. The remainder of the Scots Fusiliers were put ashore on Blue Beach for beach maintenance duties, but a high wind made navigation difficult and only Brigade reconnaissance parties and two companies of Northamptonshires had arrived on the beaches by nightfall. The carrier platoon under Captain Wakelin was landed on Red Beach.

“The first impression one had on the island “, wrote the Adjutant, “was the chirping of innumerable crickets.... As soon as we landed we formed up in assembly position, and were allotted areas. After sending out patrols and posting sentries we were told to settle down for the night. In the bay the destroyer was still pounding away at ‘Windsor Castle’—its gun silenced by the commandos long ago but its garrison resisting at the apex of the position with rifle and grenades— and in the distance could be heard the occasional rumble of artillery fire and the crack of a sniper’s rifle. The only other evidence of battle was the body of a dead African which lay stretched on the beach, a casualty of the first landing.... Apart from an occasional shot from a sniper nothing disturbed us during the night and next morning we were relieved on the beaches by the Inniskilling Fusiliers of the 13th Brigade.

1st and 2nd Bn’s: The capture of Diego Suarez

“At nine o’clock on the morning of May 6 we started to march across the island towards Diego Suarez. The 17th Brigade was ordered. to go forward with all speed. The Northamptonshires and Seaforth preceded us and we were in reserve. No Fusilier will ever forget that march. The road was little more than a track, deep in red sand. Along it we trudged in the tropical heat. We were laden with all the kit we could carry, as we had no transport for essential items. Lieutenant Cope, the Pioneer officer, bitterly complained afterwards that he had to carry a bag of 6-inch nails; the Orderly Room staff trudged along with their typewriters and every company clerk and runner had a hurricane lamp in his left hand. So at least we started. But as the midday sun got hotter and hotter much of the stuff was unceremoniously dumped and, no doubt, adorns the native Malagasy houses to this day. Some fell out completely exhausted by the side of the track. Eventually, after about 15 miles, the carriers started a ferry service and the Battalion

assembled by the side of a little stream near Anamakia, the Makia. Everyone scrambled into it and lay relaxing their cramped limbs in the cool water. The effect of washing, shaving and cooling off made us new men.... We were now informed that the leading brigade had been badly cut up and that we were ordered into a night attack to capture Antsirane.”

Over 13 miles had been covered on the march to Anamakia and the arrival of the carrier platoon was welcomed; the carriers were used to send the men on to Con Barriquand, the assembly position. Here there was half an hour's rest before the Battalion, on foot again, left at 6 p.m. for the forming-up position near Ouvrage, which was reached an hour later. There was a further wait at Ouvrage, zero hour being put back to enable the Royal Navy to stage a diversion. Despite the supposition that the South Lancashires had been swallowed up by the French garrison, General Sturges decided that he could hasten the capitulation of the defence by a blow from behind, and arranged with Admiral Syfret to land a party right inside the port itself. The destroyer *Anthony* with 50 Royal Marines on board under Captain M. Price was despatched from the fleet in Courrier Bay to round the head of the island by Cape Ambre. The night was moonless and completely dark when the destroyer dashed, at its full speed of 32 knots, between the pillars of the narrow entrance to Diego Suarez harbour. The light batteries spotted her and opened fire, but she retaliated instantly and one lucky shell struck and extinguished the searchlight on shore which held her in its beam. She landed her party on Antsirane jetty, and immediately turned and fled the way she had come without damage or casualties. Using hand grenades freely the Marines moved through the dark waterside streets and captured first the naval depot and then a military barracks, where they found and freed a number of British prisoners, including some Scots Fusiliers. The Fusiliers were given French weapons and set out to join in the final stages of the operation. “This highly successful action “, says the 17th Brigade account, “no doubt had much effect on the morale of the people in the town, but it did little to assist forward Battalions of 17 Infantry Brigade to rush concrete machine gun emplacements in the main defences.

At 10 p.m. the 17th Brigade crossed the start line, cleared and marked by officers and men of the 1st Scots Fusiliers. The Brigade order of battle was as follows. On the right were the 2nd Northamptonshires, followed by the 2nd Scots Fusiliers less “B” Company and the carrier and mortar platoons. On the left were the 6th Seaforth, who were only I Go strong, with” A” Company of the 2nd Welch Fusiliers; they were followed by the remainder of the Welch Fusiliers, now under command of the 17th Brigade. The dispositions of the 2nd Scots Fusiliers were: “A” Company on the right; Battalion Headquarters. in the centre; “C” Company on the left; “D” Company and Headquarter Company in reserve. The attack, which was preceded by heavy bombing and shelling, went in on both sides of the western road, running from Ambararata to Antsirane. A gap was forced in the enemy position, and the 2nd Welch Fusiliers passed through the Seaforth at the anti-tank ditch, followed by the remainder of the 29th Brigade.

To quote a 17th Brigade account: “The line of advance of the Brigade took the leading Battalions between the forts and these were left for the future. There was considerable machine gun fire from these forts but, fortunately, it was not very effective and the leading Battalions appear to have suffered most of their casualties from stout-hearted enemy machine-gunners in the trench system. None of these fixed defences seems to have been affected by artillery fire or air bombardment; this was probably due to the complete lack of observation. The objective of the leading Battalions was a line north of the native town of Antanambad; this was reached at 2300 hours, a night attack to a depth of over two miles. The success signal was put up and the reserve

Battalions, the 2nd Scots Fusiliers on the right and the 2nd Welch Fusiliers on the left, came up. These two Battalions pushed right through the main town of Antsirane, with little or no opposition, and reached the harbour. The reserve Battalions having been committed, Brigadier Festing, 29th Independent Brigade Group, decided to exploit the success of the 17th Infantry Brigade to the fullest and pushed forward 'B' Special Service Squadron, followed by other units of his Brigade Group. Although the road was much congested and flanking forts were still firing, there were no casualties during this move."

The progress of the 2nd Scots Fusiliers, which went into action about 270 strong, is recounted by its commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel I. D. MacInnes:

"After leaving the sugar cane the Battalion checked formation and advanced with their left on the road, connecting up with the 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers, who were on their left. Major J. V. Bailey, Second-in-Command, sent back for the reserve company, proceeded off to the right, captured about 15 prisoners in a trench and rejoined the road by the wireless station, which was held by the 2nd Northamptonshires. This company actually entered the town ahead of the Battalion, cleared some enemy out of a trench at the infantry barracks and then held the main crossroads. Major Bailey and a small party went on down to the end of the Rue de Colbert. Meanwhile, Headquarter Company had become separated from 'C' Company and moved off to the right, eventually reaching the main crossroads, which they held.

"At about 2300 hours the left sections of 'C' Company came under fire from the pillbox on the road. Corporal Lyle entered first and about 15 prisoners were captured. The remainder went straight on and negotiated a 6-foot anti-tank ditch. The rate of advance was slow owing to the nature of the ground. On reaching the native quarter, which had some houses burning, the Battalion passed through 6 Seaforth and advanced down the right side of the road—'C' Company, Battalion Headquarters and 'A' Company. On reaching the crossroads, Major McNeil-Cook, M.C., Headquarters Company, was found, and shortly after the Second-in-Command and 'D' Company appeared. The Battalion then proceeded to clear the right side of the town—right, 'A' Company; left, 'C' Company. The carrier platoon of the 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers went on ahead and Brigadier Festing followed with a section of 'C' Company as escort.

"When the leading elements of 'C' Company were within 300 yards of the Governor's House, the 1st Battalion Scots Fusiliers came up and the two Battalions, with pipes playing, reached the Governor's House simultaneously at about 0035 hours, 7 May 1942."

After its gruelling 36 hours, the move of the 1st Scots Fusiliers to Antsirane was relatively less eventful than that of the 2nd Bn. The Battalion had been ready to move at 7.30 p.m., "A" Company leading, with the Commanding Officer, Adjutant and Captain Hamilton; then "B" and "C" Companies, followed by Rear Battalion Headquarters and "D" Company. The Commanding Officer met the Brigadier on the main road at 8 p.m., to learn the order of march. The defence was still lively, using much shot and shell, and the party was obliged to take cover for half an hour. At about 9.30 the march to Antsirane began in darkness amid confused firing which varied in intensity as the column advanced. This was not allowed to interrupt progress, however, and when necessary the tanks and carriers reduced speed so that the rifle companies could continue to advance protected by their armour. Antsirane was reached in this fashion at 3.10 a.m.

No mopping up on the flanks had been attempted during this frontal thrust, and the Bellevue Fort by the shore was still firing in the morning. In the town, however, the defence had collapsed. "At about 0100 hours on May 7, D 3", records Brigadier Festing, "the commanding officer of the

2nd Welch Fusiliers entered the Residency, accompanied by Captain Simmons, whilst the Second-in-Command and Adjutant with the crew of a carrier entered Defence Headquarters; here they captured the French Military Commander of Diego Suarez, and the French Naval Commander of Madagascar, with their respective staffs. These officers formally surrendered to the Brigade Commander at 0145 hours on D 3. The remainder of the night was spent in rounding up prisoners and getting the town under control.... The Orangea Peninsula and other positions surrendered with the honours of war on the morning of D 3.”

A member of the 2nd Scots Fusiliers describes the scene in Antsirane at 2 a.m. on the morning of May 7 when the 17th Brigade arrived: “The 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers pipers had joined our own and together marched to the Governor’s House. Prisoners were rounded up and the Malagasy themselves, who had evidently been hurriedly armed by the French, were only too willing to surrender. Most of them were not in uniform and the sight of one venerable native, wearing a bowler hat and carrying a white flag, proved too much for the good humour of the ‘Jocks’. Every time a soldier approached this gentleman he solemnly raised his bowler and bowed, carefully waving his flag.”

Early that morning “B” Company of the 2nd Bn arrived from its detached task, the attack on” Windsor Castle “. Total casualties in the Scots Fusiliers had been slight and further fighting now seemed unlikely. The troops were allotted billets, the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers and the East Lancashires in the Antsirane Barracks in the Boulevard de Sakaramy, on the gate of which a Union Jack was hoisted at *Reveille*. After daylight the town of Antsirane appeared normal. The inhabitants went their way taking little interest in the invaders. The presence of numerous chickens in the streets ensured that the unwelcome monotony of bully beef for breakfast could be broken. All that day the Battalions remained in the town waiting for news. The garrisons of various batteries, including some from the Orangea Peninsula, came in to surrender after a brief bombardment by the battleship *Ramillies*.

The last of the batteries to capitulate, the Point de Vue, did not do so until May 8, the day following the signing of the draft treaty. The 2nd Scots Fusiliers took the surrender. The Battalion moved off early towards Point de Vue, about two miles out of Antsirane, and awaited the evacuation of the garrison. In the blazing heat of the sun we formed up,” says an eye-witness, “presented arms and gave full honours of war to the French garrison.... We stood to attention as file after file of fine-looking Senegalese soldiers marched past, headed by their trumpet band. When they had passed we moved on towards the fort.” The fort stood on a commanding eminence on Orangea and formed part of the southern defences of Diego Suarez Bay. The approach march by the coast road round the eastern shore of the bay was enlivened by a clear view of the British Fleet riding at anchor.

One significant incident, apart from several false alarms, brought home to the British troops the reality of the Japanese threat. On the last day of May, while at anchor in the bay, H.M.S. *Ramillies* was hit and a tanker sunk by torpedoes. On the previous day an unidentified aircraft had appeared over the coast and then vanished from view. The official Admiralty explanation was that the torpedoes were fired from Japanese midget submarines, carried to the area in Japanese U-boats I 16 and I 20. Two Japanese sailors, hard-pressed after their daring act, scuttled their submarine and took to the mangrove swamps, where they met their fate at the hands of the Commandos. Thus it proved that apprehension of a Japanese penetration into the area had not been unfounded. Enemy activity was reported also at Nosi Be Island to the south; U-boats were

attacking shipping in the Mozambique Channel, and there were rumours of enemy aircraft refuelling at Majunga.

On May 9, the day on which the Point de Vue garrison came in and the port defences and installations as well as the whole town of Antsirane had been finally won, this message was received from London:

“Prime Minister to Admiral Syfret and General Sturges:

I congratulate you cordially on the swift and resolute way in which your difficult and hazardous operation was carried through. Pray give all ranks my best wishes and tell them that their exploit has been of real assistance to Britain and the United States.

Add for 29th Brigade only:

I was sure when I saw you at Inverary nine months ago that the 29th Brigade would make its mark.”

Four immediate awards were announced for the Scots Fusiliers. In the 1st Battalion the Military Cross was awarded to Second-Lieutenant P. B. Reynier (“D” Company) and Military Medals to Lance-Corporal R. T. I. Bowen (“C” Company) and Fusilier N. Robinson (“B” Company). In the 2nd Bn Corporal Lyle was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal; Colonel MacInnes was Mentioned in Despatches.

A stone cairn stands at the Scama crossroads, two and a half miles south of Antsirane on the Anamakia road, to commemorate the dead of the two Battalions. Rough, dark-coloured blocks of native stone have been cemented together to form a low obelisk. The ridge on which it stands looks down on the plain and on the graves which are there amongst the scrub and cactus. On a cement plaque the names of the dead are boldly inscribed under the superscription, “Dinna Forget”, supported by two heraldic thistles. The legend reads, “To the glorious memory of the Royal Scots Fusiliers who fell in the assault on Diego Suarez on May 5/6, 1942”. The names of 31 fallen non-commissioned officers and men of the 1st Battalion are headed by those of Captain M. Mitchell, Second-Lieutenant T. S. Smith and Second-Lieutenant W. S. Powrie. At the foot of the cairn, under the heading “Died during the Occupation”, are the names of six non-commissioned officers and men of both Battalions who succumbed to sickness. The cairn was built by the pioneer platoon of the 1st Battalion. With the exception of two who were buried in Antsirane and Anamakia cemeteries, and one who died in the hospital ship *Atlantis* and was buried at sea, all Scots Fusiliers who Lost their lives in Madagascar lie at Scama crossroads.

The casualties of the 1st Battalion, in addition to the killed, were five officers wounded: Major N. E. G. Morrogh-Ryan, Major J. D. O. Delano-Osborne, Lieutenant R. J. Thompson, Second-Lieutenant P. B. Reynier and Second-Lieutenant M. J. Aufdermaur; and 85 other ranks wounded. An additional 20 were reported missing at the time.

A commemoration service held by the French for their own dead in the small Cathedral at Antsirane was attended by the commanding officers of the Scots Fusilier Battalions on May 14. A memorial service was held by the British in the Cinema Colbert next day.

The two brigades now turned to the completion of their task, the securing of Madagascar against Japanese infiltration. During this period of consolidation, the 1st Battalion was engaged in constructing an elaborate trench system across the main southern road and around Artachart airfield, at which a South African Air Force squadron, equipped with Beauforts and Marylands, later reinforced by a Royal Air Force Lysander contingent, was presently stationed. This air force was entrusted with wide coastal and sea reconnaissance in expectation of a Japanese thrust

towards Africa. The 2nd Bn remained on the Orangea Peninsula. Battalion Headquarters, with Headquarter Company and a platoon of "D" Company, were at Point de Vue. "A" Company was on the beaches round the southern fringe of the bay; "B" Company in occupation of a fort of the Foreign Legion type at Mamelon Vert, a projection into the Indian Ocean; while "C" Company was employed in off-loading the ships at Ankorika. One platoon of "C" Company was given the agreeable task of escorting a hospital ship back to Durban, where they were received as conquering heroes. Later, a party of three officers and 30 Fusiliers escorted French prisoners to an unknown destination. They returned to the Battalion in Persia, with tales of great journeying in the Union of South Africa.

The war situation in the East had not improved, but the anticipated Japanese attacks on India and Ceylon failed to mature. The War Cabinet was anxious to restore the 13th and 17th Brigades of the 5th Division to their interrupted passage to India. The aim was to perfect a local arrangement with the Madagascar French which would obviate further fighting yet ensure the security of the island harbours and the inviolability of the convoy route through the Mozambique Channel; but French procrastination proved exasperating. Vichy France retained two first-class harbours, Majunga and Tamatave, and a number of lesser ports, as well as several airports in southern Madagascar. Meanwhile, in common with other units of the occupying British force, both Battalions of the Royal Scots Fusiliers were needed, in good condition, in other theatres of war; whereas they were now deteriorating in health from malaria and dysentery. In the 1st Battalion, the Commanding Officer was a casualty, and malaria had made such inroads that the forward companies had to be replaced by the Pretoria Highlanders, a Battalion from one of the two South African brigades which had been sent to relieve the British force. In the 2nd Bn half the officers were infected and the ranks were becoming more and more depleted.

The risks implicit in such a situation were altogether too high. It was therefore decided to solve the problem by extending the conquests, using the 29th Brigade and a South African contingent, part of which would at the same time replace the two departing brigades of the 5th Division. The relieving brigades from South Africa arrived before the end of June. The Pretoria Highlanders relieved the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers and the King's African Rifles the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers on the Orangea Peninsula. On June 11, on board the *Keren*, which had brought the 1st Battalion to Madagascar, the 2nd Bn sailed for India with the 17th Brigade, passing the familiar landmarks of the bay and coast.

1st Bn: Majunga and Tamatave

On 19th August the 1st Battalion joined with the Pretoria Highlanders in beating *Retreat* in Antsirane, and General Sturges took the salute at the subsequent march past.

The capture of the ports of Majunga and Tamatave, to which the 29th Independent and the 22nd East African Brigades were now committed, were not engagements of the same magnitude as Diego Suárez. The expeditions, which were under the command of Major-General Sir W. Platt, General Officer Commanding East African Command, were named operations "Stream" and "Streamline", but to avoid confusion "Streamline" was subsequently changed to "Jane". Both operations involved extensive preparations. On August 21 the 1st Battalion embarked for Mombassa in the two transports *Dunera* and *Dilwara*. A realistic exercise named "Touchstone" was staged at Mombassa on September 5, exactly four months after their first arrival on the

beaches of Madagascar. “D” Day was September 10. The task of the 29th Brigade was to capture Majunga, and to protect the subsequent landing of the 22nd East African Brigade, which was to pass through the town and advance on Tananarive, the seat of government.

Majunga, at the mouth of the River Betsiboka, was the principal harbour on the west coast of Madagascar and the first port of call for mailboats from Europe. The town itself was well-built, clean and supplied with electricity, having a population of 24,000. Shortly before midnight on September 9 the ships slipped quietly up the swept channel, which had been marked by faint green lights, and released the first wave of assault troops. The role of the Scots Fusiliers was that of floating reserve, with the exception of “D” Company, which was to capture some enemy guns on Datsepe Peninsula and landed accordingly. The French made only token resistance. Some small arms fire directed at the lighterage quay and other points on the foreshore caused the only casualties suffered by the Brigade; 13 in all, of which 4 were fatal.

“D” Company of the Scots Fusiliers under Major J. E. Ray, which landed on Katsepe Peninsula, returned to the convoy unscathed two days later with reports of seeking an enemy who would not stand and fight.

On the afternoon of September 13 the convoy, having re-embarked the 29th Brigade, sailed from Majunga round the north cape to deal with Tamatave on the east coast. The South Africans remained in possession of Majunga, sending columns through the mountains and by way of the Crocodile Lakes to gain the high tableland and Tananarive. The French governor escaped to South Madagascar with a body of troops, but was overtaken and defeated.

It was hoped that the taking of Tamatave could be arranged simply and without loss to either side, but French pride and ill judgment decreed otherwise. Tamatave was the principal port of Madagascar and the main collecting and distributing centre for the interior, with a mixed population of about 21,000. As in the case of Majunga the assault was to take place at dawn, with the now familiar routine of beach landings followed by a converging attack. The convoy approached the beaches on the morning of September 18, the battleship *Warspite*, an aircraft carrier and attendant cruisers and destroyers moving in formation, with battle ensigns flying and guns trained on the foreshore emplacements.

The joint commanders signalled to Tamatave: “If you wish to save life hoist a white flag on Takio Point Lighthouse and on Government House when you feel you can surrender with honour.” The Vichy Chef de Region flatly refused to receive an envoy. He was told that an envoy would be sent nevertheless, and that if he were fired upon the town would be bombarded. The craft bearing the envoy was machine-gunned and returned. A five minute bombardment by the Royal Navy followed, and the white flags duly appeared.

1st Bn: The advance on Tananarive

The Scots Fusiliers, once disembarked, had only a passing glimpse of Tamatave. A personal account of the operation mentions: “a crazy 65-mile journey by Walt Disney train to Bricquaville. This strange contraption had steamed into Tamatave during the bombardment. As the train rocked on its way the Battalion had time to think over the Commanding Officer’s words: ‘We have to push on to Bricquaville at once. After that, if the King’s African Rifles haven’t got through from the other side [i.e. from Majunga] you will be going on to Tananarive on your feet.’ The distance from Bricquaville to the capital was 100 miles. Bricquaville was found to be a ram-

shackle village surrounded by malarial swamp, its main feature a corrugated iron shed which rejoiced in the name of 'Claridge's Hotel'. The village commanded the western side of a great girder bridge over a wide river. The Vichy authorities had preserved the bridge but had removed all rolling stock 100 miles up the line, and on the eastern side of the river had wrecked the track where it passed above some precipitous gorges. Meanwhile the Commanding Officer had pushed on along the road to Tananadve with a flying squad of cyclists. As soon as the main body was released from Bricquaville it was rushed forward in the limited available transport."

The King's African Rifles were given ample time to reach Tananarive first, in spite of the eagerness of the Scots Fusiliers to take part in its capture. The Battalion record tells of hard work to restore communications by repairing the thorough demolitions carried out by French forces escaping from Tamatave: "Over a stretch of about 80 miles in length the Scots Fusiliers rebuilt 20 complete bridges of an average span of 30 feet and strengthened some 15 others. At one point 10 bridges were either burnt down or blown up in a distance of five miles. The local natives, rounded up, formed the main body of labour. Large trees had to be cut down from the forest to make bearers and much digging had to be done to construct diversions and new approaches, as most of the rivers ran in deep gorges. Stretches of a mile or so were completely covered with felled wood and boulders. The actual bridge building was often carried out under the Scots Fusiliers' supervision, without any technical help. It was interesting work, and most of us enjoyed ourselves, although at times life was a trifle rough. Mosquitoes were the chief worry. The heat at noon was very trying and the nights, often spent without any cover, were very cold. When it rained—and it rained hard when it did—things were definitely unpleasant. The work went on almost continuously and well into the night. Food was plentiful and bananas a great source of pleasure and easily obtainable. Coffee and sugar were easily come by and most sustaining. . . . Just before departure General Platt inspected the Battalion and made some complimentary remarks." On October 14 the Scots Fusiliers embarked at Tamatave in the *Dunera*.

Sir Winston Churchill makes this observation in a chapter on Madagascar in Volume IV of *The Second World War*:

"... as a result of these operations, and at the cost of little more than a hundred casualties, we had gained full military control over an island of high strategic importance to the safety of our communications with the Near and Far East. The Madagascar episode was in its secrecy of planning and precision of tactical execution a model for amphibious descents. The news arrived at a time when we sorely needed success. It was in fact for long months the only sign of good and efficient war direction of which the British public were conscious.

Chapter VI

THE CAMPAIGN IN BURMA— 1st Bn—1943—1945

South Africa and India—Arakan patrol—An interlude for reorganisation—The "Railway Corridor"—Pinwe—A cross the Irrawaddy—The end of the Burma campaign

JAPAN was the last of the Axis powers to capitulate. In the Far Eastern theatre the vital British interests were India, Australasia and Singapore. Singapore had fallen early and the two

British sub-continent was seriously threatened. The Americans had assumed responsibility for recovering the archipelagoes in South East Asia, for keeping China in the war and for bringing retribution to the Japanese homeland. The British role was the defence of India.

1st Bn: South Africa and India

From Madagascar the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers had sailed with the 29th Independent Brigade to South Africa for rest and convalescence after the heavy incidence of malaria in the island. The Brigade landed at Durban on October 24 1942 and the Scots Fusiliers travelled by train to M'Kondeni and marched to Hay Paddock Camp near Pietermaritzburg. On the following day Lieutenant A. C. Hardwick was unfortunately killed in a railway accident and buried in the evening of October 27. On St. Andrew's Day, November 30, the Battalion was visited by Colonel the Honourable Deneys Reitz, who had succeeded to the command of the 1st Battalion in the Rhineland in 1918 after the death from wounds of Lieutenant-Colonel G. Bissett. Colonel Reitz, who was at this time Minister of Native Affairs in the South African Union Government, is well known as the author of *Commando*, an autobiography dealing with the period of the South African War. He died in London two years later whilst occupying the post of High Commissioner for South Africa.

On December 2 the Scots Fusiliers moved to Durban where they remained occupied in platoon training until January 1943, when they embarked in the *City of London*, bound for Bombay. It is recorded that one day during the hot voyage the ship was making so much smoke as to cause concern to its escort, H.M.S. *Hawkins*, which signalled a message of protest: “, From H.M.S. *Hawkins*—Revelations XVIII, verses 17 and 18.” Recourse to the Bible deciphered the signal thus: “For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off And cried when they saw the smoke of the burning, saying What city is like unto this great city!” To which the *City of London* replied: “Regret necessity for Revelations—but Job XXX, verses 29 and 30 “; which read:

“I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls. My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat.”

During the year 1943 the British and American forces were preparing for the Burma campaigns of 1944 and 1945. The 29th Brigade became part of the 36th Division, under command of Major General F. W. Festing, who had commanded the 29th Brigade at Madagascar. He had been succeeded as brigade commander by Brigadier Stockwell, the former commanding officer of the 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers in the same formation. The other brigade of the 36th Division was the 72nd. For a year the 29th Brigade was stationed near Poona, where it continued training in amphibious and jungle warfare and studied Japanese combat methods.

Burma covers an area of 250,000 square miles, a territory as large as Germany, most of which is forest. Great rivers run from north to south; the most notable is the Irrawaddy, which is navigable for 1,000 miles. Until now these rivers had obviated any need for road or rail systems. The only usable road was that from Rangoon to Mandalay, from which debouched one of the few lateral roads, the Burma Road to Chungking in China. The Japanese, equipped so lightly as to be independent of highways, were in possession of the whole country with the exception of a strip in the north-east, between China and Bengal and Assam.

Many plans to inflict defeat on the Japanese were considered. Amongst them was one to use the 36th and 2nd Divisions in a seaborne attack on Akyab Island, at the south-westerly tip of the Arakan, in order to loosen the enemy hold on this strategically important area. In face of competition for suitable ship-ping, first for the Italian campaign and then for the final invasion of Europe, this and other plans had to be abandoned. In the end, Admiral Lord Mountbatten, Supreme Commander of South-East Asia Command, decided that the air and not the sea should be used as the second arm of combined operations in the Far East.

By now, Lieutenant-Colonel Armstrong had left the 1st Battalion. For a time Major N. E. G. Morrogh-Ryan was in temporary command. On July 12 1943 Lieutenant-Colonel W. S. Ritchie (later Brigadier Ritchie) took over and remained in command of the Battalion until March 1945, almost to the end of the Burma campaign.

1st Bn: In the Arakan

The first operations in which the Scots Fusiliers were engaged in Burma took place in the Arakan. This strip of bleak, mountainous territory on the west coast of Burma was one of the chosen Japanese axis routes to Calcutta, the other being through Assam. A daring exploit was carried out on the Mayu spine by a remarkable Japanese Colonel, Tanahashi, with a small force using unconventional methods. The 7th Indian Division, under command of General Messervy, was surrounded there and owed its survival to air supply, a fact which influenced subsequent thought on the conduct of the whole war in Burma.

Under their new commander, the Scots Fusiliers were given a role as part of the reserve in the Arakan for three and a half months. The 36th Division was made available to the XV Corps with certain limitations. It was not to be deeply committed, as it was due to return to Poona in April for training in combined operations. The Fusiliers sailed from Calcutta and arrived at Chittagong on February 10. The Division, according to plan, was assigned reserve and defensive duties in the neighbourhood of the Mayu passes of Goppe and Ngakyedauk (“ Okey-doke” to the troops). After a day spent in reorganisation, the Scots Fusiliers moved by train as far as Dohazari, and by motor transport to Chiringa, before taking up positions on February 13 along a perimeter on a bull-dozed track east of Bawli as Brigade mobile reserve. Its role was that of a striking force to drive any intruding enemy formations on to the other two Battalion areas. The Battalion reached full strength with the arrival of the carrier platoon, which had travelled separately across India.

Training in the new tactics began almost immediately after arrival at Bawli. All heavy and unnecessary kit was sent to a Battalion dump. A share in the extensive process of clearing up, after the damage caused by Tanahashi, was given to the 36th Division, which played its part in the extrication of the entrapped formations and the general task of reorganisation. On the last day of the month the Scots Fusiliers relieved the 1/7th Dogras among the Mayu features.

Each company formed its own perimeter, except one company which was given a counter-attack role. Once established, the companies began forward patrolling, first only as far as the Rekhit Chaung, but later into close contact with the Japanese. There was a series of sorties and skirmishes by the companies on features named to express the character of the territory: the Col, Star Hill, Three Knobs and Three Pimples. The patrolling was of two kinds; the reconnaissance patrol, which was usually given a route by Battalion or Company Headquarters leading through the area round the company base, to look for signs of Japanese in that vicinity; and the fighting

patrol, the role for which was often to find out if the Japanese were still in possession of a certain feature. The fighting patrols had no easy task. The enemy position about which information was required was often some knoll on the top of a razor backed ridge, from which all cover had been blasted by artillery fire and aerial bombardment. The only approach to the Japanese bunker would be along the ridge, on which movement was only possible on a one-man front. The last few yards to the bunker would be commanded by a Japanese machine gun inside it. Great courage and skill were required to find out whether the Japanese were still in possession or not. If they were, and if the patrol suffered casualties, the difficulties of evacuating the wounded back to the company base can well be imagined. It was with a fighting patrol sent up to the Three Knobs position that Corporal Nelson of "B" Company, who had been one of the mainstays of the Battalion football team for many years, was killed. On another occasion "A" Company sent patrols on three consecutive days to Point 731, where they did valuable work as a result of which Lieutenant Elliott was awarded the Military Cross.

The Fusiliers and their companion Battalions gradually began to contain the enemy. On March 20 the Battalion was out of the line for a spell as Brigade reserve at Chota Maunghnama, guarding Divisional Headquarters, and back again on April 3 in a new area. The threatening situation was now under control and little action remained to be taken over this second outbreak of hostilities in the Arakan. Even a mock evacuation of one of the high points by the Scots Fusiliers failed to tempt the Japanese to fight. As a result the Battalion was left with little to contend with but the distribution of supplies which had to be brought three and a half miles uphill by jeep and mule. To aggravate this difficulty the jeep track collapsed during a fortnight of rains. The weather on June 3, when the Battalion was withdrawn to Kyugyuang Transit camp, was providentially dry; otherwise all the unit's baggage and ammunition might have had to be destroyed.

On June 4 the Fusiliers embarked at Kyugyuang on the Naf River and sailed for Taungbro. Next day they moved by road to Dohazari and entrained for Assam. As Colonel Ritchie observed: "Conditions had been trying and the men saw little result for their work. Nevertheless, morale remained high and the Battalion is now ready to take on the Japanese anywhere."

1st Bn: An interlude for reorganisation

The Scots Fusiliers arrived in Shillong on June 7. Six weeks were spent in this locality during which the Battalion rested, refitted on a war equipment table of their own choosing and trained for operations which would impose a severe physical strain. The target was to cover 30 miles through thick jungle in 24 hours, and before the Fusiliers left Shillong they had achieved 25 miles on road and across open country in about 10 to 12 hours. The rest period which was to have occupied the first fortnight was somewhat spoiled, because the Battalion was in a new camp in virgin pine woods in which a road and drainage system had to be built. It was now known what the future held. The Fourteenth Army Commander, General Slim, who was welcomed by the pipes and drums of the Fusiliers when he visited the Division in June, had been explicit about what lay ahead in the course of a talk with officers and non-commissioned officers.

At the beginning of July the 72nd Brigade moved to Ledo in North Assam, the railway terminus for the Sadiya oilfields. The news was released at a 29th Brigade conference on July 17 that the 72nd Brigade was being flown to Myitkyina. The wooden bridges on the Ledo road had

not stood up to the monsoon floods. Two roads are strategically and popularly associated with the campaign in Burma: the Ledo road and the Burma road. The campaign was not solely concerned with the expulsion of the Japanese from Burma, but also with the problem of supplying General Chiang Kai-Shek, whose forces across the Chinese border were hard pressed. The Americans drove the Ledo road to its junction with the Burma road, road, doggedly fighting and constructing through mountain and forest. In the meantime they supplied the Chinese through an air corridor across the northern mountains, "The Hump" as it was called, for many months. The monsoon of 1944 hindered but did not completely stop the Allied offensive in Burma after General Stilwell had seized Myitkyina. When the weather improved two main Allied forces were converging on central Burma. The Fourteenth Army under General Slim, moving from Imphal in Assam, was driving eastward; and the Anglo-American forces first under General Stilwell and then under General Sultan, were advancing southward from Myitkyina.

1st Bn: The railway corridor

The 29th Brigade, led by the Scots Fusiliers, was placed at short notice to travel to Ledo by rail, with an airborne scale of equipment and baggage. The divisional artillery and the balance of transport was to follow about the end of September, when the Ledo road was expected to re-open. The 72nd Brigade was to move down the railway from Myitkyina to Mogaung, concentrating at Pahok, eight miles to the west, and attempt to eject the Japanese from the defensive positions they were occupying in front of Taungni. The 29th Brigade was to follow for use as required. Until the arrival of artillery and transport the Division was to cover the withdrawal of the 3rd Indian Division (the Chindits) and the reorganisation of the Chinese. The force was to be maintained by air. Infantry, guns, even mules and bullocks, were to be landed on airstrips. By 1945 almost 100,000 tons a month of supplies were being delivered to the troops in Burma by this method.

Four tasks were given to 36th Division in its operations in North Burma and the Shan Hills against a retreating enemy, who was however prepared to offer battle in accordance with his needs and opportunities. The first task was to open the railway corridor which passed through the jungle from Mogaung to Naba, and there forked to Mandalay in one direction and in another to Katha on the Irrawaddy. The second was to act as a firm base from which two of General Stilwell's Chinese divisions could operate to the east towards the Burma road. The third was to provide a defensive western flank for the entire Northern Combat Area Command. The final and longer term task was to make contact with the Fourteenth Army, which at this period was still 100 miles to the west. It was not yet over the Chindwin and was fighting, as the Allied forces in Burma had always been compelled to do both in retreat and advance, across the grain of the country.

Colonel Ritchie arranged an unofficial reconnaissance of the forward areas for himself and his Intelligence Officer in an aircraft carrying 28 Chinese from Ledo to the front. He says that the terrain in which the Scots Fusiliers were about to fight "was a vast and inhospitable stretch of heavily forested and jungle-covered hills, interlaced with numerous broad, fast-running streams. The valleys enclosed paddy fields, elephant grass and scrub, mainly water-logged. Across its surface ran the broad ribbon of the Ledo road. At intervals there were clusters of parachutes where supplies had been dropped; generally, tented camps had been made of them—scarlet, blue

or yellow “. The party was lucky enough to be ordered down to the landing strip without delay. Often the Dakotas had to circle for from one to two hours before landing on an airstrip which was probably at that time busier than any other airfield in Asia. Aircraft were landing and taking off at the rate of one a minute; fighter-bombers on a three-minute turn-round; light-liaison, reconnaissance and ambulance aircraft, troop-carrying and load-carrying Dakotas; all this within a mile of the battle for Myitkyina, yet only occasionally interrupted by an enemy shell or a sniper at night.

On August 3 “B” Company, Tactical Headquarters, “C” and “A” Companies were flown in to Myitkyina in that order. A new “station” had been opened on the road to Myitkyina since Colonel Ritchie’s visit, and the approach was easier both for troops and jeeps. The Commanding Officer went ahead of the Battalion in his jeep and found an Indian engineer Battalion erecting a transit shed, although spasmodic firing, mortaring and dive-bombing was in progress only 400 yards away. This was the last stage of the battle for Myitkyina, which fell that afternoon.

On August 7 and 8 the Fusiliers moved forward in “Buda” and jeep trains. They surprised a party of twenty Japanese at a bridge, and killed one and wounded two others. The remainder escaped to the jungle. One of the Fusilier officers was seen standing menacingly over a stricken Japanese in evident doubt as to his next step. He turned to the Commanding Officer and said: “He’s not quite dead yet, sir. Shall I finish him off?” Thereafter, to his dismay, he was known to the Fusiliers as “Killer So-and-So “.

The Battalion was bound for Mogaung, which was then a sea of brown mud through which all guns and heavy equipment had to be manhandled. It was reached by the first flight rail convoy of the Battalion at about midday on August 8. The flight pushed on to Pahok, leaving baggage parties to trans-ship the stores. The causeways of the railway and houses perched on piles were the only objects visible about the levels of the monsoon floods. An intense humidity, which had followed the improving weather, caused casualties from heat exhaustion. In the 72nd Brigade, which was still in the lead, three men died of heatstroke. At about this time, however, greatly increased quantities of salt were distributed as a corrective. At one period a mug of salt and water was given to each man as he arrived for meals, while a cigarette tin filled with salt was emptied into the 250-gallon water cart.

In this uncomfortable temperature the second and third convoys of Scots Fusiliers staged at Mogaung and went on in the cool of the next morning. The passage of equipment through the quagmire was a tedious process and occupied several days. Major Wu, a cultured Chinese with a university degree, was attached to the unit as interpreter and early proved his value by inducing his compatriots to lend six-wheeled trucks to the Battalion. In this and all subsequent operations, the Fusiliers were gravely handicapped by having only light transport, and that in meagre quantity. The Chinese had come by road but the 29th Brigade had been flown in. The aircraft carried only a Brigade pool of 20 jeeps, which had been formed at Ledo. Seven of these vehicles worked between the airstrip and rail-head, two or three were used as motive power on the railway and the remainder were needed to move supplies forward from Mogaung. The jeeps were fitted with four separate railway wheels, supplied by the Americans, bolted on in place of their road wheels. Bogie assemblies, salvaged from wrecked stock, were used intact as small trucks able to carry six to eight men, or the equivalent weight in stores. Heavy lorries were obtained from the Chinese in exchange for petrol. The progress of the Brigade down the railway corridor between Myitkyina and Mandalay was much assisted by the use of improvised railway transport; on the

other hand bridges and tracks had often to be restored. Air supply remained of first importance. Throughout their journey the Fusiliers cleared the tough vegetation unaided to make dropping zones, and with assistance from the Brigade Field Squadron, Royal Engineers, constructed many light plane strips.

In his book *The War in Burma* Roy McKelvie writes: "The maintenance of air lines of communication during the monsoon for a mobile and aggressive operation was Festing's chief apprehension. Unlike the Chindits, his was a normally-equipped division, but his transport had been pared.., and his anti-tank units had been reformed into mortar batteries. Otherwise, his equipment was not designed for long range penetration. The Americans were responsible for air supply, some of his gunners were Chinese and he had under his command British, Chinese and Burmese."

During a week of organisation at Pahok, the Scots Fusiliers manned and managed the divisional dropping zone, piquet the Brigade camp and protected the field maintenance centre. The southern prospect from their flooded trenches was a valley varying in width from one to five miles and flanked by jungle-covered hills. Road and railway both followed this route, often parting to a distance of a mile or so and re-converging again. The valley floor was of paddy fields and high grass, broken by numerous bunds which made admirable concealed sites for light machine guns. On the east side of the valley was the Namyin Chaung, a fair-sized river and military obstacle, its far bank covered by a belt of marshy jungle. Chaungs, liable to fill up in the rains, criss-crossed the valley, and most of the bridges had been destroyed. Some villages stood in the floods surrounded by trees and bamboo clumps. After rain the broken road was difficult for jeeps but usable by lorries, of which the Chinese artillery owned a few.

On August 5 Major-General Festing arrived at General Stilwell's headquarters by air. According to his own account, he saluted and said: "Festing reporting for duty, sir." Without looking up, General Stilwell replied: "Take Taungni." General Festing promptly left and with his only available brigade, the 72nd, drove the Japanese out of the village and thus provided a screen for the Chinese to re-group. General Stilwell's public relations officer, Eldridge, who was regarded as very pro-Stilwell and critical of the British, described General Festing later as "a legendary giant striding the jungles of North Burma. He was four and a half inches over six feet, wore enormous Ranger boots, an Australian bush hat, fur-lined Air Force leather jacket when it was cold and anything when it was hot.... He did more for Anglo-American relations by personal contact than anyone except, perhaps, Mountbatten. He was the type whom the Americans admire."

The 36th Division was moving swiftly and the 29th Brigade was soon absorbed into the events around Taungni. On August 17, after preliminary dispositions on the two previous days, the Scots Fusiliers were disposed with "B" and "C" Companies at Kyungong, "A" Company at the south end of Taungni and the remainder of the Battalion at the north end. Movement to these positions was made when the temperature was reasonable in the mornings, and in the course of it "B" and "C" Companies filled in two huge craters in the railway line one and a half miles from Taungni, and using the Commanding Officer's jeep as engine established a shuttle railway service between Sahmaw and Taungni. Taungni was odious. In the centre was a large hole into which the Japanese had thrown 180 bodies which had been partially burned, and on their arrival the Fusiliers fired the entire village as a necessary sanitary precaution. Two more great craters were rapidly filled, so that the sappers could restore the railway track for a further two and a half miles

to Mington. That evening there was an improvised railway service working in three sections, bringing up stores from Sahnaw to Mington, and two days later the track was completely re-laid.

The eviction of the Japanese from the Taungni district had been bitter work. The Battalions of the 72nd Brigade were now reduced to strengths which varied from 300 to 350 the bulk of the casualties were from heat and sickness. They had stopped short of the Nansan Chaung, which was believed to be occupied by the enemy, although his defences had not been located. The 29th Brigade, therefore, was now to be the spearhead of the Division's advance. The Fusiliers moved up to Mington on August 19 and 20, rested on August 21 and relieved the Gloucesters next day, coming under command of the 72nd Brigade. The baggage scale was light and the Battalion had only two mortars.

"We had in support", writes Colonel Ritchie, "a Chinese 4-gun 105-millimetre battery with a call on the rest of the Chinese-American-British artillery group, consisting of a Chinese 4-gun 155-millimetre and 6-gun 4-2-inch mortar batteries, and a British 4-gun, 3-7-inch battery which had recently been dropped. This group was in support of the Division and commanded by Colonel Dupuis, a most helpful and able American Gunner. The Chinese batteries had American liaison officers and forward observation officers, our F.O.O. being Lieutenant Chung, an American-Chinese. In addition, we had an American forward air support control, which worked alongside my command post. Once a strike had been sanctioned by Brigade we could control the aircraft by wireless and direct them on to the target with the aid of excellent photos of a scale of 140 yards to the inch. With such intimate touch our air support was excellent and during the attack sorties would be over every 20 to 30 minutes. The air support officer was Lieutenant Boyle. We also had a machine gun platoon of "D" Company, 2/Manchesters under Lieutenant Hunter." In a later comment Ritchie adds: "The control of air support was more intimate than I have seen elsewhere."

The Scots Fusiliers' position was on a minor chaung about a mile and a half north of the Nansan Chaung. It was muddy and the weather was breaking. Reconnaissance patrols began probing for the positions not found by the 72nd Brigade. A patrol from "A" Company, moving down a road to the right of the Battalion front, came upon a Japanese bunker and killed three of the garrison; while a patrol from "C" Company, moving along the railway, drew fire from positions covering a broken bridge on the Nansan Chaung. Within 30 minutes of the return of this patrol, American fighter bombers went into action with bombs and machine guns. No dislodgment was achieved, and that night a "C" Company patrol exchanged shots with the enemy at the bridgehead. The reconnaissances continued for two more days until the eve of the attack on August 25. The most important was an air reconnaissance by the Commanding Officer and Captain E. E. Miller, second-in-command of "B" Company, during which they discovered possible routes round the Japanese flank. A second flight was undertaken by "B" Company Commander, Major R. Coulter, in order to memorise landmarks.

As a result Colonel Ritchie decided that "B" Company, organised into two combat teams as it was under strength, supported by an artillery observation post, and with a 48 wireless set but without mules or mortars, should move through the paddy to the south-west of Namyin To, cross the Nansan Chaung and work up to the railway track at Bench Mark 581 by the village of Nansankyin. Air, artillery and mortar support were arranged. The company, their way lit by a quarter moon, left the Battalion position at 7 p.m. on August 24 with instructions to be in a position to attack Nansankyin at 5.15 next morning. The going was bad once they turned south,

as the route lay through thick elephant grass, lesser chaungs and deep irrigation ditches. These necessitated so many detours that the column was 1,000 yards short of its assembly position at midnight, enveloped in darkness and drenched by torrential rain. An hour had been lost, and when the company was halted on the north bank of the Nansan Chaung a Japanese listening post, at first unaware of the assembled column, came to life 30 yards away on the opposite bank. It escaped into the bush. The main crossing of the chaung by toggle rope took one and a half hours as the river was 40 feet wide with banks four feet deep and the current was running very fast. Captain Miller and 10 men went over first and patrolled as far as the eastern edge of Nansankyin. They then covered the crossing of the rest of the column at another point. A base was formed, the eastern outskirts of the village were entered and found free of the enemy, and the advance into the village was continued. There were difficulties in radio communication with Battalion Headquarters, the wireless set having become waterlogged.

The column was nearly through the village when a light machine gun opened fire and snipers became active. A Fusilier was killed at point blank range. The cover was too thick among the trees for effective counter-fire, but 77 and 36 grenades were used. The area was searched, but the only trace of the enemy was a quantity of blood, and the advance was continued. Two more machine guns opened fire and 20 men of the second combat team were pinned down as well as advanced headquarters. The first combat team at once formed a firm base in expectation of counter-attack. All movement could be stopped by enemy fire from deep cover. The second combat team retaliated with Bren and grenades. The 77 grenades, invaluable for allowing small groups to withdraw even when completely surrounded, served their purpose, and another strong point was built. Two-inch mortar smoke was put down to screen the troops who were still in trouble and all, except for one killed, got back to the strongpoints; after which the enemy position in the woods was accurately engaged by mortar fire.

It was not yet 3 o'clock in the afternoon, but fatigue and strain were becoming apparent in the column. Further, if the Japanese already encountered were outposts of an established position at the western end of the village, a counter-attack might be imminent. Communication with Battalion Headquarters, artillery and air had been lost. It was decided, therefore, since the required diversion had been successfully created on the enemy's right flank, to remain in the relatively secure position that the column now occupied.

At first light on August 26 an officer's patrol went out but failed to reach "B" Company, which after an interrupted night was fending ably for itself in Nansankyin. By the time the patrol returned "B" Company was in complete possession of Nansankyin. The position at Bench Mark 581 on the railway track was taken from another quarter by "A" Company, and the light machine gun platoon of the support group was sent there. "B" Company rejoined the main body from Nansankyin, and with "C" Company and Battalion Headquarters entered the perimeter in Pinlon. "D" Company was disposed forward to protect the road. On August 27, "C" Company took over "Greyhen", a bridge a mile short of Pinbaw, which was obstinately defended and had previously resisted an attack by the Welch Fusiliers, who later shared, however, with "A" and "C" Companies of the Scots Fusiliers in the capture of Pinbaw itself. According to local information the Japanese had expected to hold the place for a month. The losses during this action were a grim tribute to the leadership of the non-commissioned officers. Sergeant Cairns and Corporal Rouse of "B" Company and Corporal Kelly of "A" Company were killed; and Corporal McCarthy of "A" Company later died of wounds.

At this stage a temporary halt was called by the 36th Division in obedience to higher direction. The roads were atrocious and the Scots Fusiliers' baggage was scattered as far to the rear as Mignon. Local Indians and Burmans reported that the Japanese had withdrawn south of Hopin, and this was confirmed by Battalion patrols when the forward movement was resumed early in September. For administrative and other reasons a halt at Pinbaw was essential. The Battalion's strength was now down to 23 officers and 410 other ranks, a decrease caused largely by malaria, foot rot and heatstroke. The unhealthiness of North Burma made deep inroads into the fighting capacity of both armies; the conditions weighed heavily also on the Japanese, who were short of food and without air supply or sky ambulances.

The events of early autumn concern the small, bombed-out town of Hopin, identified with the Chindits. It contained the usual mixed population of Burmans, Chinese and Indians and lay in a valley, five miles wide, flanked by jungle-covered hills. On the floor of the valley were fields of paddy in which lay scattered villages surrounded by thick copses. Down the eastern side ran the Namkin Chaung. Across the middle passed the Myitkyina to Mandalay railway and road. Hopin had been reported as unoccupied by the enemy, but it was none the less probed with great caution and at some cost in time. During the advance a Scots Fusilier patrol entered "Black-pool" where the Chindits had set up a road block during their second expedition in mid-March.

Hopin was occupied gradually between September 11 and 20, the Scots Fusiliers being the last to move in. Enemy counter-measures were still anticipated by Area Command and no movement south of the town was initially sanctioned.

Eventually permission was granted to send patrols to Alanbo, four miles to the south. This sanction was liberally interpreted and soon Brigade Headquarters was in Hopin, along with the East Lancashires, while the Welch Fusiliers were established at Ywathit on the road two miles to the west. The Scots Fusiliers found themselves on the railway at Alanbo and patrolling beyond Namma, a further six miles to the south. On September 23 and 24 "A" Company carried out a reconnaissance in force to Namma and two miles beyond it to Letpandan, where a temporary standing patrol was established. Nearly 1,000 resident Burmese, Indians and Chinese were in Namma, who said that the place was frequently visited at night by Japanese. The company pushed on during darkness and at dawn came upon the enemy, losing Fusilier Cunningham killed and two men wounded. The Japanese force, estimated at two light machine guns and a dozen rifles, was fired upon, and the company withdrew unmolested. A friendly Burman later reported the departure of the enemy after burying two dead and taking with them two wounded. This Burman proved invaluable, as he held a Japanese pass and travelled freely as far as Mawlu. He was prepared to do anything for opium, but his information was uncharacteristically reliable.

Namma offered the first real cover south of Alanbo and was used as a patrol base. The population remained suspect and at the end of September was evacuated with all goods and chattels to the Chinese quarter at the east end of the village, where there were some empty basha huts. After that, operations to the south could be securely undertaken, day or night, by covering the southern exits and denying any warning to the Japanese.

On the other hand some discreet fraternisation was possible, and on one occasion, while General Festing was touring the area, a lengthy visit was paid to a most amiable Chinese family of three generations. The fact that neither party spoke the other's language proved no obstacle; tea was sipped, cigarettes and cheroots exchanged, and eventually the British departed with two large ducks and three pineapples at a cost of about 150 salt tablets. "Generally", says Colonel

Ritchie, “we got on very well with the neighbouring villagers, who offered us chickens and eggs in exchange for salt, sardines, bully and, occasionally, parachutes. Such barter was later forbidden. When we arrived I had paid a ceremonial visit to the local headman complete with the Pipe-Major, who provided incidental music—which went down well. This resulted in a request for permission to hold a ‘party’ for the harvest festival (coinciding with the Hindu Dusehra) to which the whole Battalion was invited. Permission for the festivities was granted, but as they took place after dark it was considered inadvisable to send representatives. Later, we were given a Burmese entertainment by two comedians and two dancers. The show, although even an interpreter did not help us to understand it, was quite amusing and the style not unlike our own music-hall comedians. The ladies came in for some considerable chaff from the villagers as they followed the prerogative of their sex in taking an eternity to get dolled up.”

After Pinbaw there seemed no reason to doubt that the Japanese had pulled back south of Mohnyin, but being unmolested during the retirement they had returned north, although not far enough to be within patrolling range nor to disclose their strength or dispositions. Hence there was no information whether the Japanese north of Mohnyin were merely a covering force or whether their intention was to stand.

Moreover, the railway was badly damaged at Namma, while further south the bridges were down and the road petered out south of Ywathit. A poor track existed from there to Bilumyo, five miles north-west of Mohnyin. The Division was thus faced with the necessity of an advance to regain contact with the enemy and to build up communications, including a passable road to bring up the guns.

The advance down the Railway Corridor “was resumed on October 15. By this time the Scots Fusiliers were patrolling to Letpandan and Bogon, and standing patrols were being maintained at Lemi, west of the railway, and on the railway itself two miles out in front. The strength had increased to 25 officers and 550 other ranks. The Chinese interpreter, Major Wu, had gone, having understandably no liking for the jungle.

The advance of the Welch Fusiliers and the East Lancashires of 29th Brigade, together with the Chinese artillery group, was to be in a southward direction on the road. The Scots Fusiliers with two light batteries were to follow the railway to Namma, and thence take a tolerable road already in existence towards the main route of the other Battalions. The 72nd Brigade was to take over the axis of the railway so as to maintain the thrust. Movement, if possible, was to be by night. The operation began on October 15 with the advance of the Welch Fusiliers.

During the planning stage the Brigadier offered rewards of 1,000 rupees for a Japanese officer prisoner, 500 for an ordinary soldier and 100 for an identification. On October 14 “D” Company sent out a fighting patrol to Nyaunggon, about four miles south of Namma, which was believed to contain Japanese. The patrol located and shot up a post and withdrew. On returning they found traces of blood and a Japanese cap which one of the Fusiliers frivolously donned. Just then a Japanese came up the railway and seeing what he took to be one of his own comrades, he approached to within 300 yards before becoming suspicious. Sergeant McLean shot him dead and his identity disc showed that he belonged to the 34th Independent Mixed Brigade, the presence of which had been suspected but not confirmed. This identification won the reward for the sergeant, and deservedly, as it gave the code number of a formation as yet unknown to British or American intelligence. From this discovery a stiffening opposition was deduced, wrongly as it turned out. The 34th Mixed Brigade had in fact begun to move up but the order was countermanded, and at

that time it was not encountered in force by the 36th Division. So far, the formations engaged by the Division had been the Japanese 53rd Division and the 24th Mixed Brigade.

Further fighting in the "Railway Corridor" lay ahead. Meanwhile General Stilwell had been relieved of his command in Burma and was returning to America to supervise the training of all forces in the United States, where he later died in retirement. He was succeeded by General Dan. I. Sultan, his deputy and an expert military engineer.

During the Battalion's night journey by rail to Namma with its two light batteries, one of the trains carrying baggage, guns and ammunition consisted of a box truck and a large flat loaded with all eight guns. It was an anxious moment when this load passed over a badly damaged bridge, which had been shored up by Royal Engineers to bear the weight, but not guaranteed. The enemy was found at first light in Nyaunggon. During the same night the standing patrol which had been lodged in the village held its position under heavy mortar fire from the Japanese and was relieved next morning by the South Wales Borderers.

On October 18 the Battalion moved to Namtinsan Bongyaung, a mile north of Bilumyo, and was rejoined by "B" Company, which had been escorting the guns. It went into a perimeter to protect Brigade Headquarters together with a light battery and field company. The second light battery was in action towards Bilumyo. That night the Japanese heavily shelled a point 1,000 yards distant and the Battalion, according to the War Diary, "learned to dig".

In the meantime the attacking Battalions were making progress. The Welch Fusiliers had moved into Bilumyo and Pinwe without resistance, but had a brush with the enemy at Pintha. The East Lancashires on the left had met no more than patrols, and had entered Mohnyin by midday on October 19; their advance had been delayed more by the state of the roads and the need to use bullock carts for transport than by the Japanese. That morning the Scots Fusiliers entered Bilumyo and passed through to its northern suburb of Mohnyin, leaving a company to guard the Chinese artillery, and sending out another to Helon to serve as a link between the Welch Fusiliers at Pintha and the East Lancashires in the southern end of Mohnyin.

In view of the lack of opposition it was decided to push on. The country had now deteriorated into jungle, through which road and railway diverged by as much as six miles before rejoining at a point 16 miles to the south, at Mawhun. From Pintha, four miles west of Mohnyin, a track ran south to Kadu, which was linked to the road by another track to Wayongon, five miles from Mohnyin. Future moves would depend upon events. The Japanese intentions were still obscure but there was reason to suppose that they were in position at Kadu. Accordingly the Welch Fusiliers went down the enclosed track to Kadu, along which they already had forward elements, while the Scots Fusiliers took the Wayongon track, from which they could converge on the Welch Fusiliers. The East Lancashires maintained pressure on the railway. Kadu and Wayongon were deserted, and the pursuit continued. Next morning the Scots Fusiliers started for Ywathit, about six miles away, where the road cut over the hills to rejoin the railway at Mawhun, while the Welch Fusiliers followed the "Railway Corridor".

Some delays were caused by an unfamiliar type of antipersonnel mine on the Ywathit road. Lieutenant J. Christie, the leading platoon commander of "D" Company, trod on one of these mines, which fortunately was designed to put up a puff of smoke five seconds before exploding. In general this ensured that no one was hurt who was careful. Some of the mines were well laid, but others clumsily. Unhappily, the last of the monsoon rains descended and obliterated mine-laying traces; however no casualties were sustained. Later a pancake shaped, instantaneous mine

was encountered, but this was designed only to detonate under the weight of vehicles, some of which it destroyed in the course of the campaign.

There was some stiffening of enemy resistance on the outskirts of Nanyingow, short of Ywathit. On October 24 a fighting patrol of the Scots Fusiliers went down a jungle track towards Mawlu, clearing mines and booby traps, and surprised a Japanese post armed with machine guns and grenade dischargers. A confused encounter, in which Fusilier Parker was killed, had to be broken off through lack of fire power. Next day "C" Company set off down the track to dislodge the enemy, taking with it a section of medium machine guns and two detachments of 3-inch mortars. The machine guns were manhandled behind the leading platoon. It was hoped that the weight of supporting fire would keep the enemy from retaliating while he was being outflanked through the dense jungle. The mortar detachments carded a mile of cable each and took up positions alternatively along the track, having an observation officer forward with the vanguard. The Japanese were found in the same position as on the previous day. Under covering fire from the machine guns and mortars the company went round the right flank, while a platoon led by Lieutenant P. G. M. Taylor was sent deep round the left to attempt to put a stop behind the enemy. Unfortunately the post withdrew before the plan for its destruction could develop, and Lieutenant Taylor and his platoon lost their way in a marsh and were not seen again until evening. In the twilight of the jungle the company continued its way along the track, blasting out the enemy with mortar fire as intermittent opposition occurred.

A resolute stand by the Japanese developed at about midday in a bunker visible from 200 yards down the track. The Scots Fusiliers' mortars and machine guns made no impression and flying splinters from grenades discharged by the enemy soon became a danger to the machine gunners. The full extent of the opposition was not known, but the noise and fire in the surrounding jungle seemed menacing, and here it was precarious to call down fire from the Chinese artillery because of the danger of tree bursts. The maze of jungle and lack of recognisable features ruled out the possibility of an air strike. Patrols failed to find the enemy's flanks in the dark and boggy forest despite continued and strenuous efforts, and at 3.30 p.m. it was decided to establish the Battalion in a perimeter for the night. Meanwhile the bunker was bombarded by 105 and 155 millimetre guns.

At 5.30 a.m. next morning the attack was resumed in the half light through a ground mist. It had been preceded by a heavy artillery concentration the previous evening, followed by harassing fire until 3 a.m. It was hoped that the Japanese, dazed by this violence, would be overwhelmed by the dawn attack; but no enemy was visible, except one very shell-shocked individual for whom the Brigadier refused to pay the rupee reward, when the assaulting companies went in on each side of the track. When examined, the enemy position impressed the officers as being a very tough nut to crack if determinedly defended. It was well dug, with good overhead protection, covered a front of about 600 yards and had a depth of 500 yards. The flanks were on cliffs or steep slopes. It was probably designed to hold a Battalion, but had been occupied by a company, which could be taken as a further indication that the enemy had originally intended to make a stand but had changed his plan and was still moving back to some pre-arranged line. The obstacle surmounted, "C" Company passed through the others as advanced guard, and "B" Company went on through the woods by a track 400 yards south of the bunker. "C" Company moved on to Mawpin without a shot being fired, and when rejoined by the rest of the Battalion crossed the

Ledan Chaung into Mawhun. There the Scots Fusiliers were relieved by the Welch Fusiliers an hour later.

The 36th Division had now passed a topographical landmark on the road to Mandalay. The main watershed had been crossed, and the chaungs now flowed south instead of north. A more important fact, however, was that the troops were fighting along the grain of the country and not across it, as the Fourteenth Army had to do over the Chindwin. The landscape was covered with deep jungle, into which the Welch Fusiliers and the East Lancashires, coming up, again plunged, making a further advance of five miles.

The Scots Fusiliers, who had settled down for three days in company perimeters protecting Brigade Headquarters, intercepted five Japanese at last light on the evening of October 26, killing one. These were identified as belonging to the Japanese 34th Brigade; they had presumably lost their way when the Brigade was turned back and were trying to rejoin that formation. All other identifications obtained from that time until the end of November were of the battle worn 53rd Division, which was known to have been reinforced.

With a mixed transport column of mules, bullock-carts and railway flats, the Battalion moved up to relieve two companies of the Welch Fusiliers at Mawhe, five miles south of Mawhun, later sending two companies to relieve detachments on the railway two miles further on. Orders for the following day were to cover the remaining eight miles to Mawlu, placing company picquets out at Sopein and Nyaung Bintha on the railway and road respectively, about a mile to the south and south-east of Mawlu village. The Scots Fusiliers moved forward with their pack mules and after four miles passed through the East Lancashires at Hwemun, taking over from them a platoon of machine guns and some artillery observation posts.

Here the jungle gradually receded from the floor of the valley and the road and railway ran together along the eastern foothills, the thicketed heights almost overhanging the roadway. In such cover small delaying detachments could have caused infinite trouble. Carefully watching its surroundings, the advanced guard felt its way forward. Shortly after midday Henu, the former Chindit "White City" block, situated about 1000 yards north of Mawlu, was reported clear. The Battalion closed up and "A" Company pushed ahead on a two platoon front.

The Japanese had chosen to make their stand at a railway station and by the bridge south of it. The leading platoon of "A" Company came under accurate fire some two hundred yards north of the railway station and were checked. After some delay, the remaining platoons put in a flanking attack, but were held up by enemy bunkers covering the open ground. Meanwhile "C" Company, which had just reached the Henu Chaung, was swung out further to the west with the object of approaching the western flank of Mawlu by a less exposed route.

The enemy machine guns, medium and light, had been pinpointed by 3 p.m., and "D" Company set off round the eastern flank under fair cover. During the approach the Chinese artillery registered. It was intended that "D" Company should enter Mawlu from the north-east and "C" Company from the west covered by an artillery concentration. "A" Company's role was to stand fast while "C" and "D" Companies swept the enemy from the town in its direction. For once the wireless was constantly reliable and there was admirable communication. The artillery arrangements, however, proved complicated and registration was slow. There was some confusion between ground and air observation, and on this particular occasion the co-operation of British with American gunners seemed to present some difficulty, which was aggravated by an urgent call from "C" Company for the dispersal of some opposition. However at 5 p.m. the

concentration came down, enabling "C" Company to reach a position within a short distance of the railway, "D" Company to establish itself in the north-east corner of the village despite persistent sniping, and "A" Company to penetrate as far as the railway station.

Various set-backs having retarded the pace of the attack, it was now dusk; and as mopping-up operation by three converging forces would have been an extremely risky undertaking, the companies dug themselves in for the night. The wireless, after working perfectly for several hours, had failed, but fortunately not before final reports had been received at Battalion Headquarters, which remained at Henu with "B" Company. A field line was later run out to "A" Company, which was close enough to the other companies for signals to be retransmitted. "A" and "C" Companies were still harassed by snipers while digging in.

The day had brought casualties. Captain A. N. Crossley and Sergeant Young of "A" Company, and Fusilier Campbell of the intelligence section (with "C" Company) had been killed, and Corporal Stewart of "A" Company had been wounded. Major M. J. Evetts, who commanded "A" Company and was awarded an immediate Military Cross, had some narrow escapes, sustaining three minor wounds from bullets or splinters. Sergeant Liddell of "A" Company was awarded an immediate Distinguished Conduct Medal for great gallantry in locating and subduing enemy machine gun posts. Just as the situation was warming up for "A" Company, General Festing arrived and asked if he could visit them, thereby increasing the anxieties of the company commander. The General later excused himself by remarking that he had not commanded the company, which was true, but he led a section vigorously when Corporal Stewart was wounded and insisted on acting as a stretcher-bearer on the way back.

After a night of shelling and grenade explosions Mawlu was searched next morning and found clear of the enemy. Patrols sent towards Sopein and Nyaung Bintha were soon in touch with the retiring force, "B" Company made a contact at a copse on the railway 1,200 yards across the open paddy, and "D" Company only 300 yards from their starting point, where they encountered a Japanese party commanded by an officer in a narrow belt of thick country.

The 29th Brigade had now covered 100 miles of rough going since they took over from the 72nd Brigade at Mignon two and a half months earlier. It was decided that the 72nd should now replace the 29th, but in order to give the 72nd a fair start the 29th was first to clear Sopein and Nyaung Bintha. Sopein was found to be devoid of enemy by a patrol of "D" Company of the Scots Fusiliers on November 5, and was occupied by "B" Company the same night after a moonlit march through the jungle. Contact was not lost, however, with the Japanese. Patrolling continued, and Fusilier Smith was killed in a sudden encounter. "D" Company was at Ponhon, a mile to the southwest of Sopein, on November 8, the day before the 72nd Brigade began its advance along the road and railway. The East Lancashires made a holding advance towards Auktaw in the parallel valley to the west, which leads to Indaw.

While at Ponhon "D" Company provided an escort for some Royal Engineers working on the road behind the East Lancashires. On one occasion an inquisitive patrol came across a party of seven Japanese, led by an officer, on the far side of a chaung. A light machine gun was sited on the chaung and a quick envelopment contrived. The Japanese were driven down into the chaung. Sergeant McLean shot the officer and acquired his sword after the pair had spent several minutes, it was alleged, chasing each other round a bush. The Scots Fusiliers remained at Mawlu until November 11, and during their stay improved their acquaintance with their Chinese gunners. The Chinese artillery was punctual in action and produced a heavy and accurate fire when required.

They did not hold similar views to the British about concealing lights nor preserving silence between dusk and dawn, but could close down very quickly in emergency. Before they opened fire there was always a long preliminary of shouted orders. One day six Chinese field officers visited the Battalion to study British methods, asking many questions through an interpreter and writing the answers carefully in notebooks. They belonged to a formation of the Chinese 50th Division which relieved the 29th Brigade, and though perhaps lacking in battle experience were of good quality and anxious to learn.

The interlude at Mawlu was used to reorganise field equipment to accord with past experience so that it could be used to the best advantage in future operations. Adequate transport arrived, and proved invaluable. The monsoon was nearly over and roads everywhere were becoming passable. The end of the rains and the opening of the roads meant an accession of power to the Allies' heavy armament in the field, which was to prove a decisive factor in the destruction of the enemy. The heavy shell of the Chinese 155-millimetre gun was bound to turn the scale no matter how stubborn the opposition. Heavily out-gunned, the Japanese were compelled to retreat down the road to Mandalay.

1st Bn: Pinwe

On November 11 the Scots Fusiliers moved forward to protect the road behind the 72nd Brigade, which was meeting firm resistance. The road was kept open by constant patrolling. Besides patrolling the road the Fusiliers had to search the jungle on both flanks and two encounters with enemy parties occurred near Hpapan, in one of which Corporal Boyd was killed. Also an ambush was planned in collaboration with the Welch Fusiliers on a jungle track leading from Ponhon to Hpapan, but (to quote an eye-witness) "the beaters were ahead of time, the guns met and exchanged shots with a party of Japanese before they reached their stand, and there was no kill".

By November 16 the 72nd Brigade had run into difficulties. The whole brigade with the exception of one company at Bench Mark 66i on the adjacent railway, two miles north of Pinwe, held positions on the road. Two companies of the South Wales Borderers were cut off 500 yards from Pinwe railway station while the rest of the Battalion was in the Gobyin Chaung, a further 500 yards to the north. The remainder of the brigade was protecting the road, gun lines and dropping zone between these points, and also Brigade Headquarters, two miles to the north. The jungle surrounding Pinwe was exceptionally dense. Following their set practice, the Japanese had constructed a road block behind the South Wales Borderers, and the Scots Fusiliers came under command of the 72nd Brigade to help in the extrication of the encircled companies.

"A" and "C" Companies moved to Tonlon, a little over a mile from the Gobyin Chaung, to protect the gun positions and the dropping zone. Battalion Headquarters, the support group and "D" Company were sent to guard Brigade Headquarters, while "B" Company remained with the Chinese artillery. All possible steps were taken to ensure the security of the lines from a sudden, swift envelopment, and with that in view the Royal Sussex less a company were released to close up behind the South Wales Borderers, while the Gloucesters were sent off through the hills to establish blocks south of Pinwe.

McKelvie writes:

“The battle for Pinwe began on Armistice Day. For three weeks the Divisional infantry, supported by artillery barrages and air-strikes, prodded, probed and skirmished for the village. The gunners poured their shells into the woods to clear away the branches and leaves, trying to improve visibility. The Japanese dug into the ground, sited their automatics with characteristic cleverness and picked off men by the dozen. It became a war of nerves. The Japanese planted snipers in trees as outposts. In what was possibly the thickest jungle in Burma they were unseen and it was almost certain death for anyone who came within their vision.

“A mass assault on Pinwe was impossible.... Platoons of men did creep over the stream by night but when daylight came they found themselves ringed by fire and pinned to the holes they had scraped out of the ground. Over 3,000 shells were one day poured into the woods in half an hour—a record barrage for North Burma at that time.”

During the days preceding November 24 the Scots Fusiliers made five moves, all with the object of protecting the road through the 72nd Brigade's area and assisting in the extrication of the South Wales Borderers. Then the Fusiliers and the Gloucesters, who had failed in their turning movement through the hills, were both ordered back for a period of rest. There was now a plan for the 29th Brigade to take Auktaw, in the next valley to the west, while the 72nd Brigade renewed the attack on Pinwe. The Welch Fusiliers were to pass through the East Lancashires at Okshiton, two miles north of Auktaw. Both Brigadiers regarded the Scots Fusiliers as essential to their plans in a general utility role, as a force ready to move either on Pinwe or by a doubtful track over the hills to Auktaw. For this purpose the Battalion was placed in divisional reserve and moved to a base about a mile and a half north-west of Pinwe. However, as it was felt that it might not be prudent for a division of only two brigades, one deeply involved, to take on a second commitment of uncertain limits, this plan was shelved. The immediate cause for dropping the Auktaw enterprise was a report, based on flimsy intelligence as was often the case, that 1,500 Japanese were present in the hills to the west. It seems likely that the troops in question were in fact the allied Kachin levies. However, as a result of the report the 29th Brigade was returned to the Pinwe front, and the Chinese 50th Division assumed protection of the right rear as far as Okshiton.

The struggle at Pinwe continued for three weeks. The Gloucesters forced a way into the Gobyin Chaung and the Royal Sussex pushed through and round the flank, but failed to clear up completely the nests of Japanese machine guns. A patrol sent out to a flank from “B” Company of the Scots Fusiliers came upon and engaged a Japanese bunker, and Sergeant Lawson was killed and a Fusilier wounded. It was now apparent that the Japanese were recklessly intent for the moment upon holding Pinwe; the operation could therefore no longer be regarded as in any way a minor engagement, but one in which success would require the best resources of the 36th Division, concentrated for that purpose alone. The 72nd Brigade, which had been roughly handled, was withdrawn and the 29th Brigade fully committed. The previous assault had been planned on a single Battalion front; the new attack was to be made initially by two Battalions, and finally by three. The orders for 29th Brigade involved the relief of the Gloucesters on the Gobyin Chaung by the Scots Fusiliers. The Welch Fusiliers were to come in on the right flank between the road and the railway, which were at that point 1,000 yards apart before reconverging at Pinwe railway station, a mile further south. Later, the Welch Fusiliers were to seize the high ground to the west of the station, while the East Lancashires edged forward on the left of the Scots Fusiliers. From their middle position the Fusiliers were then to go straight for Pinwe.

Before the weeks of conflict in that area the Gobyin Chaung had been covered with dense teak and bamboo jungle. However air strikes and some 7,500 rounds of high explosive had effected much crude deforestation, leaving a mass of tangled debris and dead Japanese. The Battalion perimeter lay astride the crossing of road and chaung with a company in each quadrant, Battalion Headquarters and the mortars being placed with the rear companies. Japanese bunkers, some of them occupied, were within about 60 yards of the forward posts. A slight rise to the left front of the perimeter with some timber still standing sheltered enemy snipers. There was a lack of crawl trenches in the perimeter, and the British troops were largely confined to their slit trenches, as all movement was dangerous. The Gloucesters had fared badly in driving the Japanese out of the position, having lost most of their officers, and during their four days in possession they had never had less than three casualties a day from sniping.

During the week for which the Gobyin Chaung was held, "B" and "D" Companies were forward, the other companies and Headquarters in the rear. Two troops of the 168th 3-inch Mortar Battery supplemented the unit's mortars, and the 366th Light Battery was in direct support. About this time, and for the next month, the Battalion was commanded by Major N. E. G. Morrogh-Ryan, the Second-in-Command, Colonel Ritchie having been injured by falling into a slit trench and flown to Ledo for hospital treatment.

Early in the morning of November 26 parties from "B" and "D" Companies cleared part of the chaung bank to gain positions from which they covered "A" Company coming in from the west. When the ring was tight, a detachment from "C" Company went into the main enemy area, where they found a number of Japanese corpses.

On November 27 the Scots Fusiliers attacked some Japanese posts with offensive patrols. On the night of November 27/28 the enemy attempted one of his intimidation sorties, which were familiar on all the fronts in Burma. "B" Company's front on the perimeter was molested by a "jitter" party, with the customary devices of hideous yelling accompanied by the rattling of tin cans. It was given a hot reception and transferred its attention to "D" Company; but no one in the perimeter escaped the effects of the sortie, as the enemy fire directed at "B" and "D" Companies fell on the rear company areas. A machine gun peppered the perimeter on the following night, but its purpose was to cover the Japanese withdrawal.

On St. Andrews Day, November 30, the Scots Fusiliers' patrols moved into the woods without drawing fire. Whereupon, according to McKelvie, the Scots celebrated their national Saint's day by "marching into what had once been Pinwe, their pipes, under Pipe-Major McMenemy, playing *Cock o' the North*. Pinwe was a burnt-out cinder heap. Only one Japanese was found and he was shot by Brigadier Stockwell's batman. The Japanese had stayed their time and gone. Later a patrol of "A" Company made contact with an enemy party a little to the south of the village, and Lance-Corporal Moody was killed. Amongst other trophies taken were two Japanese flags, one of which was presented to the 366th Light Battery.

While the 36th Division was approaching Naba Junction, the Chinese 38th Division was descending on Bhamo, to link the new Ledo Road with the old Burma Road and so complete one of the main tasks of the Northern Combat Area Command. At the same time troops of the Fourteenth Army were approaching the 36th Division from the west. From December 2 till the end of the first week in January 1945 the enemy was scarcely met. He was too actively employed after the battle of Pinwe in withdrawing from a position in the Indaw-Katha locality made untenable by the fall of Bhamo and the approach of the I 9th Indian Division of General Slim's

army from the south-west of Indaw. Indaw was entered by patrols of the Welch Fusiliers on December 10, but the Scots Fusiliers had the distinction of establishing the actual physical link between the armies of General Slim and General Sultan. On December 16 "A" Company left the Sinhaung area in motor transport to contact the 1/6th Ghurkas of the 19th Indian Division. This junction completed the great arc from the Lower Chindwin to the old Burma Road, some 60 miles north-east of Lashio.

General Sultan's mission in Burma was drawing to its close. The great task conceived by General Stilwell of reopening land communications with China, America's primary interest in Burma, was practically accomplished and General Sultan's future role was the maintenance of that road link. Apart from the massive air support provided for this theatre by the United States, the emancipation of Burma was considered by the Allies to be a British concern. However some heavy fighting against the rearguards of the Japanese divisions remained to be done before General Sultan's command was finally released from the conflict.

The 19th Indian Division was integrated into the subsequent operations and assumed responsibility for the "Railway Corridor". The 36th Division was ordered to move on Mongmit, 75 miles south-west of Katha and east of the Irrawaddy. The bulk of the division was to cross the river at Katha and move down the other Chindit waterway, the Shweli. The 29th Brigade with the 130th Field Regiment under command was to cross at Tigyaing, about 40 miles south of Katha, and move down the east bank to Twinngye, a further 40 miles to the south, from which Mongmit or Mogok could be reached. Mogok, the centre of the Burmese ruby-mining industry, seemed to the Scots Fusiliers to offer some prospects of personal enrichment; but although a certain amount of coloured glass was carefully collected against the future, only one stone of any value is known to have been found. During the second half of December the 26th Indian Brigade was flown in to reinforce the 36th Division for the advance.

From December 19 to Christmas Day the Battalion went forward in motor transport to Kunbaung and Aledaw, and finally to Thainggyi, a mile from Tigyaing, the chosen crossing place. To fall in with this plan the normal Christmas and New Year celebrations were observed together on December 28, when it was possible to relax all tactical precautions in the absence of any possible interference by the enemy. In the circumstances, the fare provided by courtesy of the American air supply was both adequate and suitable to the occasion. Lieutenant-Colonel Morrogh-Ryan now left the Battalion to join a course at the Staff College at Quetta, and Lieutenant-Colonel Ritchie, who was about to resume command on his return from hospital, met him at Katha on December 29. By the time Colonel Ritchie reached the Battalion, "A" Company had crossed the Irrawaddy on rafts and sampans and had formed a perimeter at Myadaung on the east bank. There it was joined by the rest of the Battalion on the last day of a very eventful year.

1st Bn: Across the Irrawaddy

The year 1945 began with the first 12-mile stage of a two-day march to Tagaung. The Scots Fusiliers had arranged to camp on the banks of a chosen lake, which they fished with a few hand grenades. Fish was a welcome variant from the ration, which was adequate in quantity but had become monotonous and untempting. Improvement had begun however, and there were increasing issues of the British Service 14-men ration pack in place of its Indian Service equivalent. It was also intensely gratifying to everyone that the "Mother Bird", as air supply was

affectionately called, was now occasionally bringing in fresh meat and vegetables, and sometimes eggs. Villages liberated by the advancing Allies occasionally produced a variation of diet, but they were more often deserted, the Japanese having plundered them and dispersed their inhabitants to live as best they could in the surrounding jungle.

With the Scots Fusiliers, as they resumed the march south on January 2, were some newcomers. Major J. B. M. Sloane of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who later succeeded Colonel Ritchie in command of the Battalion, had arrived from the Staff College, and so subalterns joined at the same time. The 494th Light Battery, Royal Artillery, was now part of the Battalion Group; also a platoon of the 2nd Manchesters, under Lieutenant Gadsby, who remained to perform good service until his departure at Mongmit. The Scots Fusiliers, moving partly on foot and partly in motor transport, entered Tagaung on January 2 and occupied a temporary perimeter, as they were passing on next day to Yeyin, 10 miles further along the route. Two days elapsed, however, before the Battalion took possession of Yeyin. On the way "B" Company passed through a company of East Lancashires, who had seen some fighting and were in the still burning village of Letpangon, from which they had driven the Japanese that morning. From Letpangon the Scots Fusiliers sent fighting patrols three miles forward to Mington on January 5. It was found clear and occupied by the Battalion Group.

From Mington there were alternative routes to the south, each of which was tested by patrols to a depth of 2,000 yards. The rains came out of season, and mud and flood added to discomfort, but did not affect the rate of progress. On January 6 "C" and "D" Companies each with an artillery observation post, a mortar detachment and a section of machine guns, moved on to form patrol bases at Kyanhyat and Shwezaga, five and seven miles respectively along the axis. The Japanese rearguards were hard pressed, and the advance was approaching Twinnge, where there were to be some serious encounters with them. Small groups of enemy were observed by various patrols near Myegya, around which strong defensive positions had been dug, and between January 7 and 11 the Japanese were active with machine guns and grenade dischargers about Shadaw. The Welch Fusiliers and the Kachins were involved in these engagements. The Kachins, who had been organised by both the Americans and the British into guerilla bands, took part in most of the campaign in North Burma and could claim thousands of enemy dead. Shadaw had some importance, as there were forest tracks leading through it due south from Pauktabin, which had been taken by the Welch Fusiliers and East Lancashires, as well as south-eastwards through Daungbon and Banwe and through Tonkwe and Kyaukpyu. The road to Mogok was through Twinnge.

All paths led through jungle and hills favourable to the defence. The final objective had yet to be decided and the 29th Brigade had no maintenance problems, being dependent on air drop for supplies and on light aircraft for reinforcements and evacuation of casualties; there was therefore no great need for haste. Moreover, its former opponents, the Japanese 53rd Division, had withdrawn, and there was reason to suspect the presence of fresh enemy forces. A map and orders captured by the 19th Indian Division revealed that the 3rd Battalion, 58th Regiment, of the 5th Japanese Division, based on Mandalay was covering all the roads leading south and south-east from Pauktabin. These troops had been involved in the Japanese rout at Kohima but were known to have been recuperating, and their strength in supporting arms was not known. The need for caution was confirmed by a captured enemy order for the destruction of the 29th Brigade in the Nabu area.

It was therefore wise to make sure of each step and to allow the continuing progress of the Fourteenth Army, whose guns could now be heard, to disorganise the enemy plans. The 29th Brigade was in isolation; there were no land communications between the Brigade and the rest of the Division, which was 50 miles away, and linked only by air and radio. During January '45, when the Division's pace was five miles a day, the leading infantry occasionally outstripped their signal communications. The Divisional Signals were encoding and decoding at the rate of 30,000 to 40,000 words a day. "Sometimes, when Japanese were reported in a village," says McKelvie, "the air strike called for had to be cancelled while in the air. By the time it arrived, a couple of hours at the longest, the Division's own infantry would be in possession and the Japanese some miles further on." In these circumstances the 29th Brigade continued to probe forwards with care. The East Lancashires, who were protecting the Brigade base at Mingon, explored the Kyaukpyu track; the Welch Fusiliers searched the Daungbon and Banwe areas; while the Scots Fusiliers approached Myegya, which they found defended by strong bunker positions.

An assault on the Myegya bunkers, sited in depth among dense, low-arched bamboo, promised to be costly in casualties if defended with the normal pertinacity of the Japanese. After an artillery concentration, "A" Company of the Scots Fusiliers made a testing attack, but was withdrawn with some loss. An air strike failed to shake the enemy, and after stand-down on the evening of January 14/15, when the Scots Fusiliers were just settling for the night, the Japanese made a grenade attack screening themselves behind some cattle. Fusilier Gordon was killed, and minor casualties included Lieutenants Boyd and Norman and another Fusilier. Next morning the Commanding Officer sent for the village headman and warned him that any cattle wandering near the perimeter would be shot without compensation. However, it proved impracticable for the cattle to be rounded up, and as a result the Battalion enjoyed some fresh meat.

In the afternoon of January 16, nine air sorties attacked the Myegya defences with 500-pound high-explosive bombs, rockets and machine guns. Next day, however, enemy sub-units were found in positions deeper in the bunker system, from which they fired on the reconnaissance patrols; and the total destruction of the forward bunkers was prevented by the accurate firing of grenades by the enemy, although two Japanese who exposed themselves were killed. On January 18, a platoon found Twinngé clear and set an ambush. After daylight it was passed by what was believed to be a party of Burmans. Shortly afterwards it was heavily fired upon with grenades, and was subjected to the same treatment on its way back to the main body. Five members of the platoon and five of the attached personnel were wounded, but safely brought in. This episode illustrates not only the problems of fighting in thick country but the difficulty and uncertainty of identification.

Brigadier Stockwell left the 29th Brigade in January to take command of the 82nd West African Division. He was succeeded by his second-in-command, Colonel Bastin, one of whose first acts was to attempt to co-ordinate the activities of the Brigade with those of the nearest formation of the Fourteenth Army. With this purpose in view he flew to Shwebo to visit the commander of the 19th Indian Division, of which the 29th Brigade had had a momentary glimpse at Sinhaung. The Indian Division was crossing the Irrawaddy at Thabyeikyin, about 20 miles south of Twinngé, and at Kyaukmyaung near Singu, where the Japanese were resisting vigorously. One of the early projects discussed by Brigadier Bastin at Shwebo was a diversionary movement by the 29th Brigade in the direction of Twinngé, with the object of disconcerting the enemy and easing the situation at Singu. The role of the Brigade from the time of its arrival in

North Burma had been one of harassing the Japanese at every opportunity, with which this proposed operation would well accord.

Twinnge was captured on January 24. The broad pattern of the Myegya positions and the area north of Twinnge had been plotted by January 23. As the guns were firing from the north and all reconnaissance was sent straight forward into the position, it was hoped that the enemy would continue to expect developments from that direction and to watch his front. Colonel Ritchie therefore decided to move the whole Battalion to Myegya, to interpose it between the village and the defences and, while holding a block, to clear the position by surprise from the rear. The Welch Fusiliers were to make a demonstration from the south-east, where the enemy had lodged a picquets 1,000 yards forward. On the eve of the attack patrols reported that the foremost bunkers were unoccupied. These were blown up, and after a wide turning movement during the night the Battalion turned south towards Twinnge at dawn and came upon an equally strong system of defences covering the road south of Myegya, which were found to have been evacuated. The Japanese bunkers in this area presented a tough proposition to the attacker; they were built of squared teak fixed with iron dogs, and led into crawl trenches; all were sited among clumps of bamboo. In such defences a garrison of company strength could successfully hold an attacking Battalion, unless the attack were supported by armour and preceded by heavy bombardment. The enemy clearly moved according to a time-table. Groups of Japanese infantry remained in the forests and chaungs and had to be continually dislodged by patrols, when some drifted south and others turned east towards Mongmit.

The situation at Singu which had reacted on the 29th's operations at Twinnge had been eased. The 19th Indian Division's bridgehead on the Irrawaddy had now been expanded to accommodate the entire force, and the projected diversion was no longer a matter of urgency. Moreover, the 29th Brigade was now required by Northern Combat Area Command. The rest of the 36th Division was coming up to Myitson on the Shweli river, and the 29th Brigade was ordered to move across country to join them at Mongmit and so reconstitute the 36th Division. This order cancelled the plans for a descent on Mogok, and thus left the enemy forces at Mogok uncontained and free to move as a threat in any direction. Six weeks later it was learned that this force had in fact moved by a little known track through the hills to Maymyo, where it formed a road block between Mandalay and Hsipaw.

On February 6 the Scots Fusiliers, on foot and in motor transport, moved to Thitkwebin, 14 miles towards Mongmit. The intervening countryside, rugged and overgrown, was not free of danger, as isolated parties of Japanese infested the route. At the village of Kyaukmaw, beyond Thitkwebin, "C" Company ran into trouble, and at first it seemed likely that a Battalion attack would be required to dislodge the enemy; but on the afternoon of February 8 it was found that they had slipped silently away into the forest. Local conditions at Kyaukmaw made the construction of an airstrip impossible; so the Scots Fusiliers moved forward to Kinnwe, four miles distant, which seemed to offer better facilities for landing supplies. The importance of having an airstrip could not be over-estimated. In that vast country, intersected by rivers and chaungs and covered with dense vegetation, only the air could supply a fighting force, and General Festing had now neither railway nor road to transport his supplies. At one time the Division had seven different dropping zones in simultaneous operation; on another occasion 81 planes landed on a strip during the first day after its construction. In one particular month the aircraft supply made 1,250 sorties in every kind of weather.

From Kinnwe the Battalion Group joined the forward elements of the Division. Contact was made with the enemy at Milestone 25, and on the Nansit Chaung and the Kin Chaung. At the Nansit Chaung a platoon patrol led by Lieutenant Kirkcaldy had a brisk engagement, silencing a machine gun and inflicting casualties. While the Welch Fusiliers and the East Lancashires were sharply engaged about the Kin Chaung, the Scots Fusiliers were rested. During the past month they had been patrolling for two days out of three. The decrease of casualties in the patrols was a tribute to the growing skill of leaders and men. Reinforcements had brought the Battalion strength up to 600 for the first time during a year in the field. There were intelligence reports at this time of a force of Japanese, 500 strong and supported by guns and flame-throwers, in the Nabu area. This was regarded as an attempt at deception preparatory to a further withdrawal. Nevertheless, as a precautionary measure the Battalion built some powerful obstacles and dummy positions in front of Milestone 25, giving special attention to protection from flame-throwers, which had recently been used against the 26th Brigade. After an air strike near Nabu, columns of black smoke had been observed, which suggested that the reported threat of their further use might not after all be inaccurate.

As the area about Milestone 22 and Nabu were likely to be the scene of future fighting, and as Brigade Headquarters had now moved into the territory of the Welch Fusiliers about the Kin Chaung, the Scots Fusiliers were sent forward to resume patrolling on February 24. "D" Company despatched a 36-hour patrol round the right flank to reconnoitre certain objectives and, finding them clear, to test Nabu from the east. This patrol, consisting of a weak platoon under Lieutenant R. W. K. Breckenridge, proved unfortunate, but a perilous situation was redeemed by the courage of all its members and by the skill and unflagging determination of its leader. Very early in its mission the platoon met a patrol of 30 Japanese and in the onset Fusilier Hargreaves was killed and another Fusilier wounded. Breckenridge got in his wounded man, extricated the patrol without further loss, and with two others formed a stouthearted rear party which hit the Japanese repeatedly and foiled their attempts to follow up. He settled down in the jungle after sending a section back with the wounded man. First light disclosed a fresh predicament. The platoon found itself between two groups of the enemy numbering each about 40 or 50, which attempted to encircle the patrol. One Fusilier was wounded in the first exchange of shots and became a serious handicap during the withdrawal, which led up a steep overgrown slope. However, the climb was successfully accomplished and casualties were inflicted on the Japanese from the summit of the escarpment.

The role of the Scots Fusiliers was now suddenly changed. They were withdrawn from the neighbourhood of Nabu and sent to seize Sindegon, four miles north-east of Nabu and situated on a hill commanding the fords at the junction of the Kin and Pazin chaungs, well in the rear of the Japanese. Native reports indicated that the enemy had gone, though a dozen Japanese were said to be in Onma, 700 yards to the south. On the evening of February 25 "D" Company moved into Sagadaung, whence it set out next morning at 6 a.m. as the Battalion advanced guard. By 10 a.m. it had arrived at the edge of the jungle beside the fords. One of the co-operative Burmans, who often proved useful informants, reported that the enemy were using the fords and offered to act as guide on a covered approach round the left flank. Taking this route, the company was in Sindegon by noon without a fight. The rest of the Battalion followed. "B" Company, when crossing the ford, and "D" Company in the village were fired on by Japanese snipers armed with

a light machine gun and rifles. Lieutenant C. A. McCulloch of "D" Company was wounded. It was decided to hold the village and nearby hill with "A", "B" and "

Companies, leaving the remainder of the Battalion Group with machine guns, mortars and two platoons of the Royal Engineers to form a perimeter on a peninsula at a bend in the chaung. During the digging of the position there was some enemy sniping, which had to be dealt with by mortars and machine guns. While trying to clear a Japanese machine gun post Lieutenant G. C. A. Terry received a bullet through the helmet which deeply grazed his scalp.

Having made the mistake of leaving the hill unguarded and allowing the Scots Fusiliers to dig in and to have a quiet night, the enemy sought to rectify his error in the morning. Shortly before 7 a.m. two parties with light machine guns and grenade dischargers opened fire on the Battalion positions from south and east, while an 80-millimetre mortar brought fire to bear from the direction of Onma. Prompt retaliation from our guns was effective, but Lieutenants R. C. Kirkcaldy and W. D. Brew and three Fusiliers were wounded. The presence of the heavy mortar indicated that more determined counter-attacks were likely to follow: so at 10.15 a.m. on February 27 "A" Company, under command of Major M. J. Evetts, M.C., with Captain Russell, R.A., as forward observation officer, set out from the perimeter to search and clear the area between Sindegon and Onma—a sortie which was to develop into a long and bitter action.

The territory into which the company penetrated consisted of small ridges running east and west of the line of search, covered with tall teak and thick clumps of bamboo. Not more than 500 yards south-east of Sindegon, moving cautiously but unable to see much, the forward platoon, No. 8, was heavily engaged by machine gun and rifle fire from three different quarters. The leading section commander, Corporal Baillie, was killed and the platoon commander, Lieutenant R. B. Faill, was seriously wounded while attempting to pull the corporal back. The leading scout of the second section was sent round the flank, but meanwhile Fusilier Hunter was killed by machine gun fire and the section commander, Corporal Murray, and Fusilier Baxter were wounded. At the same time the right hand section of 8 Platoon, under Corporal Campbell, worked down the west side of the track and killed two Japanese, one of whom was sitting on a stretcher. An attempt to obtain an identification was arrested by heavy fire and the section retired in line with 8 Platoon.

Evetts decided to withdraw 8 Platoon and bring down an artillery concentration; after which the company advanced and found that the enemy had gone, taking their dead and wounded with them. The road was cleared for another mile and "A" Company was then ordered to clear the scrub below the Battalion perimeter in the village on their way back. 9 Platoon was given the task, while 7 and 8 Platoons with Company Headquarters watched from a clearing some 300 yards away. The leading section of 9 Platoon was just turning for home when a party of Japanese hidden in the scrub opened fire on them and shot down the platoon commander, a section commander and a number of Fusiliers at point blank range. The rest of the platoon, disorganised by the sudden attack and loss of their commander withdrew out of sight of the enemy and were eventually reorganised by the platoon sergeant, who did his best to prevent the enemy getting at the casualties. It was a difficult problem for the Company Commander, who did not know whether the men who had been hit were dead, or if they were pretending to be dead and awaiting an opportunity to escape. They were directly between the enemy and 7 and 8 Platoons' positions, and to open fire might endanger them, if still alive. Smoke from 2-inCh mortars was put down,

but as none of the casualties attempted to move out of cover, it was clear that the enemy would have to be forced out of the scrub so that any wounded Fusiliers could be got back.

The Company Commander had a quick talk on the wireless with Colonel Ritchie and asked for an extra platoon to attack the enemy on the other flank. Company Headquarters with 7 and 8 Platoons then moved up to join the remainder of 9 Platoon. 17 Platoon of "D" Company under Lieutenant Breckenridge came gallantly in to attack from the opposite flank, and the enemy were driven out with a bayonet charge by "A" Company, combined with 17 Platoon's attack. The charge was stopped by very thick scrub, and Major Evetts was among those wounded in the struggle to get through. Lieutenant Breckenridge continued to lead 17 Platoon with great skill and courage until he was unfortunately killed as he came out into a chaung on the far side of the scrub. He was posthumously mentioned in dispatches.

By nightfall the threat to the perimeter had been removed, but at heavy cost. All the officers of "A" Company except the second-in-command had been wounded, Lieutenant Breckenridge of "D" Company had been killed and both companies had suffered considerable further casualties. The action has been described as the bloodiest engagement for some months, and possibly of the whole of the Battalion's service in Burma. An unusual feature was that it took place in full view of the Battalion perimeter and was watched by a large part of the Battalion from the hill on which the village stood.

Sindegon was almost the last of the Battalion's major engagements with the retreating Japanese.

On the morning of February 28 Onma was subjected to an air strike. A reconnoitering platoon of Scots Fusiliers later saw two Japanese and heard the sound of wood being chopped. Next day the Welch Fusiliers found only snipers in the village and on March 1 they debouched on to the main road at Milestone 18. On March 2 a Scots Fusiliers patrol met a patrol from the Royal Sussex at Sitton, two miles to the north of Sindegon. The 29th and 72nd Brigades were now converging through the Shan Hills on Mongmit. Isolated groups of enemy were occasionally encountered in the jungle and high grass, who might be lost, deserting or still ready to fight. On March 3 "C" Company, moving along a track towards Milestone 16, ran into heavy opposition in a locality already searched by patrols, and as a result Corporal Bateman and Fusiliers Mason and Robertson were killed and Lieutenant W. S. Austin and two others wounded. Robertson was badly hit when trying to retrieve Mason, whom he thought was only wounded, and he died before he could be got back to the regimental aid post. "C" Company forced its way forward along the track and later joined the Welch Fusiliers at Milestone 16. The East Lancashires were then in Onma.

Movement was now easier. The Scots Fusiliers were protecting Brigade Headquarters at Sindegon, with the exception of "C" Company which had replaced the East Lancashires at Onma. The Welch Fusiliers were advancing down the Mongmit road at about Milestone 12. By March 7 the 72nd Brigade had reached the Mongmit road at Milestone 10; while the 26th Brigade was approaching Mongmit, which it entered on March 8. On the same day the Scots Fusiliers and the 494th Battery were on the move again and reached Yetagun, five miles east of Mohauk.

The Scots Fusiliers' association with the Northern Combat Area Command now came to an end, as the Battalion was due to join the Fourteenth Army in its race for Rangoon. General Sultan had already said farewell to the Battalion on March 4, when he decorated men of the Brigade who had won American awards, including two Scots Fusiliers, Corporal Hammond (Silver Star)

and Captain Taylor (Bronze Star) for consistent gallantry during operations from August to October. At Padan Colonel Ritchie left the Battalion, to take up an appointment at General Headquarters, Allied Land Forces, South East Asia. He was succeeded by Major J. B. M. Sloane.

“The whole campaign “, wrote Colonel Ritchie in retrospect, “had been very satisfactory. We had covered a great distance—far more than was originally expected. We had never encountered very severe opposition but we had kept the Japanese on the move.” According to McKelvie, the 36th Division had fought against parts of two Japanese divisions, the 18th and 53rd, and two independent motor brigades. In 1944 alone they had killed 1,800 Japanese and had themselves suffered 1,000 casualties.

1st Bn: The end of the Burma campaign

Under its new commander, Lieutenant-Colonel J. B. M. Sloane, the Scots Fusiliers had a relatively inactive spell for the remainder of March. From Padan they moved to Man-na, where although there was some patrolling to pick up stray Japanese, none was found. At Man-na Major-General Festing visited the Battalion to decorate the Adjutant, Captain W. R. C. Elliott, with the Military Cross for his patrolling in the Arakan. On March 21 the Fusiliers moved by motor transport to Mogok, where the 36th Division was concentrated. Some days later, after a switch to Kysuktalon, the Scots Fusiliers set out in transport and on foot to Maymyo, north east of Mandalay on the old Burma Road. The route was by Loikam, Pangsapye, Namsaw and Hawsakansaw, where the Burma Road was first struck, over the Goktiak Pass and onward by On-Ma-Thi. Maymyo was reached on April 10 and the Battalion camped on the west side of the Harcourt Butler Lake in the Botanical Gardens. During the 11 days spent in Maymyo the Fusiliers slept under parachutes; a mobile cinema paid the Battalion a visit, a canteen was organised, and football matches and swimming competitions arranged; and *Retreat* was beaten at the Clock Tower.

The area of the enemy’s withdrawal on the plain of Mandalay had still to be cleared and the remnants of the Japanese 28th Army captured or destroyed, and this involved the Battalion in some strenuous and bitter engagements. On April 17 the Scots Fusiliers were briefed for an advance on Kalaw, in which the 29th Brigade was to take over from the 64th Brigade. On April 23 the Battalion left Maymyo for the staging area at Thalun. Next day it arrived at Kwedatson, where orders were received to take Yinmabin in a three stage attack by driving through the hills north of the road. Yinmabin was secured in two bounds, however, after a passage over difficult and waterless country. “B” Company accomplished the first stage, and “C” Company passing through on April 26 with two fighting patrols, entered the village unchallenged. The Battalion moved into Yinmabin the following day.

The Japanese were encountered in scattered groups to the south of the village. In one action on a hill feature Major D. A. M. Hare, who had succeeded Major Evetts, M.C., in command of “A” Company, was killed by rifle fire, and Lieutenant F. F. B. Martin assumed command. Major Hare had been in hospital with badly burned hands, the result of his beating out the flames of a phosphorous grenade which had exploded in the belt of a man in his company when on the march. He hurried back from sick leave in India as soon as he heard that the Battalion was likely to go into action again after Maymyo. He was killed in a gallant attempt to rescue a wounded man who was lying in an exposed position covered by enemy fire.

During this encounter, Company Sergeant-Major Jack and Fusilier Wilson both displayed outstanding bravery and initiative. The Sergeant-Major saw Major Hare lying on a slope in the centre of the chaung and was told that he had been hit. He ran out and moved him under cover, but found that he had been killed. All his attempts to bring back Major Hare's body were prevented by intense enemy fire, but after dark he succeeded in doing so. Fusilier Wilson, who was the No. 1 of a 2-inch mortar, was ordered to try to dislodge the enemy; but after trying from several positions from behind cover, he was unable to get his bombs on to his target. He therefore moved right out into the open in the centre of the chaung, where he is said to have fired the mortar by balancing the short base-plate on his knees, and succeeded in getting on to the target. Both Company Sergeant-Major Jack and Fusilier Wilson were awarded the Military Medal.

By 5 o'clock in the evening "A" Company, which had killed three Japanese during the day, found the feature untenanted; and the railway station of Pyinyaung was occupied by "D" Company, which then pushed on down the railway line. "D" Company saw 26 Japanese withdrawing, opened fire with machine guns, and killed six of them, before returning with "A" Company to the main body, which was then passing through Yinmabin.

Slowly but methodically the 29th Brigade drove the enemy out. From the Kyatsakan area the Scots Fusiliers patrolled down the Burma Road. The War Diary records that many patrols were sent out during the early part of May; and one of these, which has been described as among the most arduous and most successful patrols during the whole of the Battalion's time in Burma, deserves mention in detail. On May 5 "C" Company sent out a 48-hour reconnaissance patrol under Major Elliott, M.C., with the object of forming a road block on the main axis of advance behind the enemy defence line, and of probing the strength of the Japanese position at the top of the Kalaw escarpment with a view to discovering their strength between there and Kalaw. The start involved a long and gruelling march up a chaung lasting from dawn to dusk. Just before sundown the patrol came within sight of the road at the head of the escarpment, and on probing further found themselves on the fringe of what appeared to be the Japanese brigade headquarters position. Considerable enemy activity was observed and a brisk exchange of fire took place. As darkness was falling, the patrol spent the night on the edge of the Japanese position. Major Elliott describes the night as "interesting, listening to the Japanese jabbering ". Next morning, the patrol set off before daylight and worked their way towards Kalaw, but in mid-morning they ran into a strong enemy position. To continue in Major Elliott's own words: "At that time, we were moving along a particularly steep piece of country and the Japanese were very much above us; so we were in no position to attack. We were also short of water, having had no chance of refilling our water bottles since about midday on the previous day. Some two miles further on, we reached the head of the valley, which finished in a narrow bare funnel of cliff about 200 feet high. The road hugged the top of the cliff, which would have been exceedingly difficult to climb and was presumably held in strength by the Japanese. To attempt to have gone up that route would have been sheer suicide." The patrol eventually withdrew under a barrage of mortar fire and successfully reached the Battalion lines. For his leadership on this occasion, Major Elliott was awarded a bar to his Military Cross.

The Scots Fusiliers were now approaching the end of their service in Burma. The 36th Division was withdrawn on May 9 and next day the Battalion crossed the plain by motor transport to the Brigade Transit Camp at Meiktila, where on May 11 they were congratulated by General Festing. The entire unit under Major Du Sautoy was flown from Meiktila to Hathazan on

May 15, and entrained on May 24 for Dehra Dun in the United Provinces of India, which they reached three days later.

The Scots Fusiliers and one battery of 3.7 howitzers were the last troops of the 36th Division to be in action in Burma, the other two Battalions of the 29th Brigade having been withdrawn some time before. The Battalion was settling down to a programme of reorganisation and training for future operations in Clement Town Camp when Japan capitulated. On September 9 the Scots Fusiliers left Dehra Dun for Delhi cantonment, to take part in internal security duties which were to occupy them until their final departure from the East over a year later.

Before closing this chapter, which has so far been confined to the purely military aspects of the campaign, it may be of interest to give some idea of what these months meant to the average Fusilier. The following paragraphs have been compiled from a number of sources made available to the writer.

The outstanding characteristic of the troops was their cheerful acceptance of all conditions and situations which they were called upon to meet. On the move, a Fusilier's load in those days was massive, consisting of the old 1914/18 rifle with long bayonet, 100 rounds of .303 ammunition, two grenades, two Bren gun magazines, two or three days' rations, P.T. shoes and some spare clothing, mosquito net, shovel, steel helmet (on occasions) a machete and perhaps an item of platoon or company stores, all made up into a bundle of great weight, which the average man carried in his usual stolid manner through monsoon or hot weather for some nine months. Most men in the Battalion covered the greater part of the distance from Mogaung to Maymyo, about 300 miles, on foot with this load on their backs.

In action in the jungle the Fusilier's chance of survival depended for the most part on three factors: first, the marksmanship of the Japanese who opened fire on him, as often as not unexpectedly and from very close range; secondly, if still unhit, on his own speed in carrying out the prescribed drill of "down, crawl, observe, fire"; thirdly, on the speed with which his comrades in his section reacted. The normal role of the leading section was to locate the enemy position and to try to find a way round a flank. With the loads the men carried and under the varying weather conditions which prevailed this type of fighting called for an extremely high standard of individual training in the man himself and an even higher standard of leadership in his officers and non-commissioned officers. When not on the move there was little chance of rest, because of the normal duties of the company or Battalion base, including sentry duty, local patrols, strengthening the perimeter defences, fatigues, duties on the dropping zone, and so on; while during these periods the Fusilier must also take the opportunity to get himself, his kit and his equipment cleaned up in preparation for the next move. During the closing weeks of the campaign the contrast between the cold of Maymyo and the heat of the Mandalay and Meiktila plain was very marked, with consequent uncomfortable effects on the troops. There was also the threat of an outbreak of epidemic cholera. All water, which was obtainable only from filthy green pools, had to be boiled before use.

An officer who served with the Battalion throughout the campaign recalls the consistently fine work done by Padre W. J. Towart, whose inspiring religious services and tireless devotion to duty were invaluable in helping to maintain the morale of the Battalion, particularly during the final stages in Burma.

Chapter VII

THE 2nd Bn IN THE EAST
AND MIDDLE EAST, 1942—1943

India and Iraq—Persia—Syria—Palestine—Egypt—Departure for Sicily

2nd Bn India and Iraq

THE 2nd Bn arrived in Bombay on June 21 1942. On June 28 they moved by train to Barakana and Ranchi, where in a camp among the paddy fields they were greeted by the monsoon rains.

By September they were on the move again, first back to Bombay and a week later to Maquil, the port of Shaiba in Iraq. During the next fortnight the normal routine consisted of Reveille at 3 a.m. and training until 9 a.m., when everyone took to the shelter of the tents until the comparative cool of the evening.

2nd Bn: Persia

From Shaiba the Fusiliers passed through Baghdad into the heart of Persia and reached Kermanshah, where they were visited by the Colonel of the Regiment and by General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, who explained the underlying reasons for the frequent moves of the recent weeks. By October the Battalion had arrived at Qum, and for the first time since it left Diego Suarez was joined by its motor transport and carriers. The camp site at Qum, which the Battalion occupied for three months, was a bare, exposed hillside.

It was a bitterly cold winter. In order to resist the cold at nights the Fusiliers dug pits five or six feet deep underneath the tents. The countryside was inhospitable and Qum, in spite of its famous golden dome, was no more than a normally dirty Persian village. Relations with the inhabitants were cordial, except perhaps on St. Andrew's night when Sergeant Hutchison bought a sheep from which to produce haggis, but unhappily discovered that he had bought a goat. The New Year celebrations at Qum included the annual football match between officers and sergeants.

The Battalion left Qum in February 1943, the road party crossing over the Paitak Pass while the rest of the Battalion moved by train. During the night, after the train had passed Sultanabad, there was a terrific crash, the wagon doors burst open and the train came to a halt. It had run into an oil tanker, travelling on the same line but in the opposite direction. One officer fell from a wagon on to the embankment, but neither he nor anyone else in the Battalion was injured. The Persians in the engine were killed. The train was hauled back to Sultanabad, Headquarters of the Tenth Army, where the Fusiliers were given a welcome meal, supervised by the Army Headquarters staff; followed by Turkish baths. The journey was resumed next day with a fresh engine. From Khurramshah a Euphrates steamer took the Battalion to Maquil, where it again entrained for Baghdad. The Battalion now ceased to be a part of "Paiforce", to which it had belonged since its arrival in the Persian Gulf.

2nd Bn: Syria—Palestine—Egypt

On February 9, reinforced by a recently arrived draft, the Scots Fusiliers joined a huge convoy of vehicles crossing the Syrian Desert and moved into Palestine. From Tulkarm on February 15 they travelled on by rail to a combined operations school at Kalvit on the Great Lakes. After a course at the school the Battalion moved to Syria and continued its training in a series of exercises in the vicinity of Mount Hermon. The institution of regular leave parties to Beirut, on the Lebanon coast, was a popular feature of this time.

Meanwhile there were signs of future events. The first jeeps were delivered, and instruction began in the latest infantry anti-tank weapon, the "Piat ". Two austerity periods of 48 hours were imposed each week, during which the sole rations consisted of bully beef, biscuits and tea. In the middle of June the Fusiliers travelled by rail to Egypt, where they occupied a desert camp at El Shatt. Although no final destination had yet been revealed, training went on steadily according to a set invasion plan. The Battalion sailed in the *Monarch of Bermuda* in convoy down the Suez Canal into the Gulf of Aquaba, a desolate region dominated by Mount Sinai, where bonfires on the shore marked the so-called neutral territory of Saudi Arabia. On the sandy shores exercises usually began at about 3 a.m. and ended at about midday, when everybody bathed, in spite of rumours that the bay was full of sharks.

2nd Bn: Departure for Sicily

One evening the Corps Commander, General Dempsey, addressed the Officers, and next day the Battalion re-embarked. Another preparatory exercise from the *Monarch of Bermuda* followed at the beginning of July. As the convoy cleared Port Said it was announced that the Battalion was destined for the beaches below Syracuse in Sicily. A message from General Montgomery was read, detailed maps were issued and an accurate scale model of the Sicilian foreshore was laid out in the stateroom.

Chapter VIII

SICILY—2nd Bn, 1943

The landing—The advance on Syracuse— The occupation of Augusta—Advance to the Simeto—The battle for Catania

AT the Casablanca meeting of President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill, before the Eighth Army had swept Rommel and the Afrika Korps out of Cyrenaica and General Anderson had defeated Von Arnim in Tunisia, it was decided to attack Fortress Europe in the "soft underbelly" through Sicily and Italy. Italy was to be forced out of the war and the Mediterranean cleared for east-bound Allied shipping; the airfields round Gerbini in Sicily and Foggia in Southern Italy were required for the intensification of bombing inside Germany, and a "Second Front" had to be created to ease the critical condition of the Soviets. By June the Pelagic Islands to the south of Sicily, including Pantalleria, which were necessary as fighter aircraft stations for the assault on the Sicilian beaches, had been taken. The only remaining obstacles were the Italian battle fleet, based on Spezia and Taranto, with no great reputation for belligerence, and the German and

Italian Air Forces at Gerbini and in Italy. The airborne and beach landings were to take place on the night of July 9/10, having regard to the state of the moon.

The garrison of Sicily and its resources were considerable. By early July the two enemy air forces had 30 airfields at their disposal, of which the most important group lay to the west of the Catanian Plain at Gerbini. The Axis forces consisted of about 275,000 Italians and 75,000 Germans, including the 15th Panzer Division with 60 tanks, and part of the Hermann Goering Division with about 100 tanks, both redoubtable divisions reconstituted after destruction in Tunisia. The Italian contingent of four field divisions and five coastal divisions, equipped with French tanks, was a weaker proposition but was thought likely to show improved military qualities in defence of its native land. The beach defences relied primarily on German 88-millimetre and Italian 75-millimetre guns, supported by pillboxes armed with anti-tank cannon and machine guns. The foreshores of the island were soft and unsuitable for tanks and heavy transport but, on the other hand, were within the range of indispensable fighter cover.

The intention of General Alexander's Anglo-American Fifteenth Army Group was to strike at the low south-east coast and seize the ports of Syracuse and Licata, along with the coastal airfields, with the aim of preparing a base for subsequent advances against Augusta, Catania and the Gerbini airfields. General Montgomery's Eighth British Army consisted of XIII Corps (5th and 50th Divisions) XXX Corps (51st (Highland) Division and 1st Canadian Division) and the 231st Guards Brigade; they were directed at both sides of the Pachino Peninsula and below the port of Syracuse. General Patton's Seventh American Army was entrusted with the landing between Licata and Punta Secca, 50 miles further west. General Montgomery was to drive for Catania and General Patton to cut north into the island, as well as to form a protecting flank for the British operations.

The 5th Division (Major-General Berney-Ficklin) comprising the 13th, 15th and 17th Infantry Brigades, the last commanded by Brigadier W. B. Tarleton, M.C., approached Sicily in its transport vessels in the heat of the Mediterranean summer. The Battalions of the 17th Brigade were the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, the 2nd Northamptonshire Regiment and the 6th Seaforth Highlanders, the same combination as in Madagascar. The Scots Fusiliers in the *Monarch of Bermuda* had sailed in convoy from Suez.

The objective of XIII Corps on D Day was the port of Syracuse, to be taken not by direct assault but by landings to the south and a march along the coast. The both Division, having landed at Avola, was to secure the overlooking heights and shield the Corps beach-head from the west. The 5th Division was to beach further north, the 17th Brigade on the right and the 15th Brigade on the left. The 17th Brigade was the spearhead of the advance; it was required to seize the town of Cassibile, extend the bridgehead to include Casa Nuove and then press on to Syracuse. The role of the 15th Brigade was to protect the divisional movements on the coast from the west, while the 13th Brigade was to cut the main roads leading into Syracuse from the north-west and west after the fall of the city. The Scots Fusiliers were allotted the task of taking Syracuse, with a view to further advances towards the bridges over the Simeto River on the edge of the Catanian Plain. The 6th Seaforth were to undertake the destruction of defences on the beach and peninsula. The 2nd Northamptonshires were to assist either Scots Fusiliers or Seaforth as required, and to follow the Seaforth on the road to Syracuse; or, if it was necessary for the Seaforth to hold Cassibile or Casa Nuove, to take their place in the northerly drive.

2nd Bn: The landing

As the ships closed with the shore, a high wind rose as the moon went down and brought on a blustering night, and there was much sickness among the troops in the landing craft. Through a corridor of naval craft XXX Corps moved towards the Pachino Peninsula and XLII Corps in the general direction of Avola, an anxious and uncomfortable voyage of five miles.

The Scots Fusiliers lowered a first assault flight into the sea at 1.15 a.m. It consisted of "A", "B" and "C" Companies and Battalion Headquarters, loaded into 12 landing craft. The swell delayed the forming up of the flotillas and the first wave did not land at its appointed place, a small bay opposite Cassibile, until 3.45 a.m. "A" Company was on the right, "B" in the centre and "C" on the left. "A" Company beached 300 yards to the south of their fixed position and some delay was caused in the northward march, in course of which they encountered and rushed a pillbox. The wireless sets, drenched in salt water, refused to function and Colonel MacInnes, still out at sea, had no information about events on the beaches nor of the situation of "D" Company which was still afloat in landing craft. Battalion Headquarters landed in three assault craft at 4.25 a.m. This was not well done, according to Colonel MacInnes, as the craft conveying his second-in-command, himself, and the beach naval party set them down on a rock in deep water and half an hour was lost before they could land. The headquarters staff refused to swim, as the precious wireless sets which remained to them would have shared the fate of the others. A Commando unit which should have landed to the north to soften up the beach defences did not arrive until the Fusiliers were completely disembarked; however the absence of resistance on the beaches made this unimportant. "D" Company appeared at 4.25; its landing craft had struck ground in three feet of disturbed water and the company had to wade ashore, accompanied by some attached troops, holding equipment and ammunition overhead to keep them dry. At some points on the beaches the Navy had used grappling irons to tear away the defensive hedges of barbed wire, but the Fusiliers relied upon Bangalore torpedoes brought for the purpose. A distant Italian field battery shelled the foreshore and the passage of a minefield proved difficult. The battery and the minefield both inflicted some casualties, including Major V. McNeil Cooke, M.C., commanding Headquarter Company, who had been Adjutant of the Battalion after the return from Dunkirk in 1940, and five men of "B" Company. Its immediate difficulties overcome, the Battalion eventually moved off northwards from the assembly position towards Syracuse at 5.30 a.m. "B" Company was leading, followed by the reconnaissance and order groups, "C" Company, "D" Company, rear headquarters, regimental aid post and "A" Company less one platoon. Company Sergeant-Major Rodger and Sergeant Guthrie were left on duty at the assembly points.

So far, except for the field battery, there had been no opposition of a serious nature. The Americans at Licata had met stiffer resistance, but on all fronts the Italian coastal guns were being overrun and prisoners taken. Casualties were amazingly light and no contact was made that day with German forces. This may be ascribed chiefly to the intensity of bombing by the Royal Air Force. An air attack on the holiday resort of Taormina, between Messina and Catania, had obliterated the communications of the German high command. What has been described as a nervous dispersion of the panzer divisions, to meet attack from Marsala in the west to Catania in the east, also contributed to the slowness of German reaction. The enemy armour was disposed in four widely separated groups at Castelvetro, Cancatti, Niscomi and Misterbianco, and could

not be instantly concentrated against the invaders. On the following day, however, the Americans had to face an attack by the Niscomi group, and later still the 17th Brigade was confronted by the Misterbianco group. The invasion had been awaited and coastal defences continuously manned for several nights before July 9/10, but watch had been abandoned by the tired Italian garrisons on the very night of the invasion, in the belief that the storm ruled out all possibility of landings.

2nd Bn: The advance on Syracuse

For the first mile or so the Scots Fusiliers found open country with rocky outcrop. The track running north from the beach was rough for wheeled vehicles and deep in dust. For two miles it led the companies along the side of a railway embankment and through thick orchards, and the pace slackened as the vanguard of "B" Company worked through the cover. About four miles from the beach-head, in the vicinity of the village of Gesuili 0 Saraconi, "B" Company was fired upon by light machine guns from the walled farm of La Villa and engaged by snipers from a level crossing over the railway. It was now 8.15 a.m. and this marked the first direct contact with the enemy, apart from the pillbox encountered after landing. "B" Company deployed to the right and made some progress, but came under fire from hummocks on the coast. The snipers were ousted from the level crossing by a platoon of "C" Company and "B" Company crossed to the protection of a wall south of the farm which stood in open country and was strongly held. The Commanding Officer sent "C" Company across the road, where they were defiladed, with orders to approach the farm from the west under covering fire from "B" and "C" Companies' 2-inch mortars and a Piat. Captain J. H. F. MacMichael carried out this attack with great dash; the farm was taken and 50 Italians captured. Twenty-five participants in the British airborne attack which had preceded the seaborne landings, who had been made prisoner earlier in the morning, including some wounded, were released.

Their steady advance along the shore road brought the Fusiliers up against a thickly wired strongpoint; but at about 10 a.m. Captain G. E. Banes arrived with three carriers, the first three to leave the landing craft having been "drowned" during disembarkation, and their arrival set the pattern of the attack. Colonel MacInnes describes the engagement as follows: "The three carriers were sent to shoot up the level crossing and move up the main road to the area of Madrenza to watch the left flank and the enemy position; "C" and "D" Companies to attack this strongpoint from the left flank, coming in from the west. The forward observation officer was to get the cruiser *Erebus* to shell the fork roads in order to keep the enemy, if there, quiet. The reserve platoon of "B" Company under Lieutenant D. R. Coutts and one carrier were sent to watch the enemy's flank. During this flanking movement an unfortunate accident occurred. The naval shells were allowed to creep towards our troops with the result that one shell landed among Lieutenant Jones' platoon of 'C' Company, the casualties being 10 killed and wounded. 'C' and 'D' Companies attacked through thick orchards and were drawn to the north by very thick wire. On crossing the road they were engaged by the enemy, who were in trenches to the west of Ctroia. Fire was now coming from their right flank and their front, as they were facing east. So as not to change direction under fire, they went straight on, attacked and captured the enemy position, taking 150 prisoners and releasing many more airborne troops. Captain D. M. Gray ('B' Company) Captain R. R. D. Adamson ('D' Company) and Lieutenant Devine were wounded. While this attack was going on Lance-Sergeant Dunlop in his carrier had worked round the right

flank through the enemy pillboxes which were now holding up' D 'Company. This occurred just as the 'Piat' was being got into position. Lance-Sergeant Dunlop turned about and went straight back up the road in his carrier, firing his light machine gun. Forty Italians surrendered."

The Fusiliers, advancing along the straight Syracuse road, kept surprising Italian defences which had been elaborately constructed to resist any encroachment from the sea. This line of advance ensured that the whole enemy outpost position could be rolled up from a flank. The three companies, "B ", "C" and" D ", which had been engaged so far, were now re-formed, and during this period the Colonel, anxious to avoid delay, sent forward "A" Company with a section of carriers and two detachments of 3-inch mortars. After dealing successfully with a number of pillbox positions on the roadside, the vanguard suddenly came upon a battery of guns in concrete case-mates. The situation called for a full scale company attack, which was launched shortly after midday. Of this operation Colonel MacInnes says: "This attack was a model. One platoon with light machine guns carrying out the frontal fire, two platoons advancing on the enemy from the right flank under cover of high explosive and smoke, the carriers moving down the road and entering the enemy position. A large number of Italians were captured."

The advance was now being stoutly resisted and skirmishing was continuous. Some backbone was lent to the Italian troops by interspersed German non-commissioned officers. Just before "A" Company's attack, some Germans had been identified at a road block, in storming which Lieutenant H. A. I. Thompson was wounded; and the German stiffening probably accounted for a subsequent series of encounters which began when the leading elements of" A" Company, still in the lead, were fired at from the orchards on both sides of the road. Three carriers at once made their way forward through a group of trees on the left of the road, while "A" Company dealt with opposition on the right. Many British airborne troops appeared to be in the hands of the Italians. Fifteen more were freed at a nearby farm, supplied with arms and employed as escort to their former captors, who were used to transport them to the rear in the farm carts. Many useful pedal cycles were impounded at the same time.

It was now 4 o'clock in the afternoon and the Battalion had been strenuously engaged for 15 hours, beginning with a very rough passage from ship to shore and continuing with a fighting advance through choking dust. It had almost fulfilled its mission. However, before its entry into Syracuse there was one final engagement at a triple bridge, the Ponte Grande, some miles south of the port. This vital bridge crossed the River Anapo and the railway to Catania. It had been a main objective of the airborne assault and one of its successful achievements. Eight officers and 65 men of a British glider regiment had landed in the vicinity, and notwithstanding recurrent attacks and constant fire had prevented the destruction of the bridge, thus preserving for the Scots Fusiliers a route into Syracuse by the use of which long hours of fighting were avoided. When "A" Company reached the bridge in the afternoon, only 2 officers and 15 men of the glider regiment still survived. Captain Pettigrew passed over the intact bridge at the head of a platoon and the enemy, taken unaware, did not at once react. However, when the other platoons of the company attempted to cross, they were promptly engaged by machine gun and mortar fire which turned them back with casualties. Lieutenant Cran, commanding 7 Platoon, and several others were wounded. Enemy mortars located among scattered houses in the outskirts of Syracuse remained active, and shells hit the parked trucks of the forward observation officer and the Royal Engineers. Captain Pettigrew called back to his second-in-command, Lieutenant Bowie, to get the remainder of the company over the bridge as soon as possible; he himself then proceeded with

the men he had led across to direct a successful attack on the Italians under cover of a smoke screen. "B" Company at the same time engaged the enemy mortars by working round to the west of the bridge. As had happened elsewhere during the advance, the Italians ceased firing and withdrew. The Scots Fusiliers marched over the Ponte Grande and stood on the outskirts of Syracuse, their D Day objective. The following sentence is taken from the official history: "On July 10 1943 the 2nd Bn of the Royal Scots Fusiliers entered Syracuse, in the island of Sicily, the first port to fall in the Fortress of Europe." The first Fusiliers within the port were Captain Banes, who had reached the Ponte Grande bridge in the leading carrier, and Captain Pettigrew, who had led the first platoon across the bridge. Together they drove into the town in the carrier. Some of the streets had been cratered by the air attack at dawn and an occasional building leaned outwards over the rubble; but the town was by no means devastated, although a smell of burning was in the air. No signs of life were visible. After a quick tour, the two officers returned and reported to Colonel MacInnes. The Battalion moved in prepared for any eventuality, but met for the most part only unkempt Italian soldiery hoping for kind captors. The exception was an isolated contingent discovered in the barracks, which greeted the vanguard of the Battalion with a fusillade. The Fusiliers settled in for the night, posted sentries and cordoned the barracks. In Syracuse, they had secured a scarcely damaged port for the flow of tanks, guns and stores for the next phase of the campaign, a port which retained to the end its value as the Eighth Army's principal channel of supply.

The bridgehead was soon properly established and the Allies had gained a firm foothold. The Canadians and the 51st Division had overrun the Pachino Peninsula. Pachino airfield, although ploughed up by the Italians, had nevertheless been taken into use. The 5th Division was in Syracuse. The Americans had taken Gola and Scoglitti and were penetrating inland. Licato with its airfield north of the town and 12 miles of beach on each side of it formed a single bridgehead. All through the day reinforcements and material had been landed, in spite of some interference from the air. Despite bad weather, on the first and second days of the invasion 80,000 troops, 900 guns and over 7,000 vehicles and trucks were put ashore for the loss of only one landing craft. The contribution of the Royal Navy to the success of the landings was incalculable. Its role was not merely to disembark in safety the invading armies, but also to maintain the bombardment of prearranged targets and to act as temporary artillery support, while its defensive commitments included a watch on the Italian Fleet as well as the security of its own capital ships, for which purpose an endless chain of destroyers, corvettes, frigates and minesweepers circled day and night about the big ships. During the period of the landings one destroyer is said to have steamed continuously for 517 hours. The losses from air attack were one American destroyer and a British hospital ship, the *Talamba*, which although brightly lit and clearly marked was dive-bombed and sunk. In this ship Major V. McNeil-Cooke, who had been wounded whilst in charge of the Scots Fusiliers' landing beach, was drowned with many others.

The garrison of the barracks in Syracuse which had been cordoned by the Scots Fusiliers while they rested on the first night, was dealt with next day. The Commanding Officer led the way with a section of carriers under Captain Banes and three of the divisional Sherman tanks. The Italian troops in occupation offered no resistance but surrendered at once to the show of force. Altogether, 750 officers and men emerged quietly from the barracks and were sent back to the cages for prisoners of war.

2nd Bn: The occupation of Augusta

Two roads communicate between Syracuse and Catania. One of these follows the contours of the coast and serves Augusta, 10 miles to the north, a harbour of importance second only to that of Syracuse and the next objective of the 17th Brigade. The other road cuts across country towards Lentini, running onwards to the Primo Sole Bridge over the River Simeto and thence to Catania. By 6 a.m. on July 1 two companies of the Scots Fusiliers were marching northwards on these two routes; "D" Company, temporarily attached to the 6th Seaforth, was advancing on Priolo by the interior, Lentini road, while "A" Company, in Brigade reserve, followed the Northamptonshires along the coast road. At 11 a.m. the remainder of the Scots Fusiliers, leaving Syracuse under control of the 2nd South Staffordshires, also took the coast road and joined "A" Company and the Northamptonshires in the shelter of some sparse woods. Meanwhile a brigade attack had developed on Priolo, a wayside village on the Lentini road. The 6th Seaforth were on the left, the 2nd Northamptonshires called up from reserve on the right, and "D" Company of the Royal Scots Fusiliers in the centre. Bitter fighting lasted for the greater part of the day, as the enemy proved to be the Schmaltz battle group from the German tank concentration at Misterbianco, one of the four tactical tank groups already mentioned as part of the German defensive dispositions. Well placed to cover the walled road south of Priolo and guarding its entrance, the Schmaltz group held fast and handled its armour skilfully with support from sorties of dive-bombers. The 17th Brigade suffered casualties, lost three of its Sherman tanks and made no progress; however it was decided to renew the attack at 8 p.m., as night fell. The Fusiliers reconnoitred the area to the east of Priolo with the object of turning the enemy's flank, but patrols from the south discovered that the Germans had evacuated the village, their defence of which had been merely a delaying action. The night attack was therefore cancelled, and the 2nd Northamptonshires entered the village unopposed.

Next morning, July 12, the Scots Fusiliers less "D" Company became the Brigade advanced guard and pressed on through Priolo towards Augusta. At about 10 a.m. the delaying actions of the Schmaltz group reopened beyond the village and "A" Company, attacking a wood on heights to the north-west of the village, was halted by intense machine gun fire. At the same hour Priolo was heavily shelled by German mobile 88-millimetre field guns, and the Battalion suffered casualties. A large number of the Fusiliers were still in the main street of the village when the 88-millimetre concentration fell suddenly on the cross-roads, and the Second-in-Command, Major J. V. Bailey, and Major D. M. Mitchell were instantly killed.

The situation remained static for some hours after these events. At about midday the divisional and brigade commanders arrived for a conference, the outcome of which was the mounting of an immediate attack by the Battalion on the distant mobile field battery and machine gun positions, which "A" Company had not been able to reach in the face of defensive fire across exposed ground. The attack was to be supported by "Priests" of the 24th Field Regiment, mobile 25-pounder guns mounted on tank chassis. An artillery barrage was to be fired for 10 minutes, from 1.10 to 1.20 p.m. "B" and "C" Companies were to take the objectives with support from "A" Company, which was already pinned to the ground. The two attacking companies hurried forward in stifling heat to their start line below a ravine facing the wood which concealed the enemy guns, arriving five minutes before zero hour. With them was Colonel MacInnes accompanied by men of the intelligence section and some orderlies whom he had hurriedly

collected. Captain A. F. Whitehead of Headquarter Company, Lieutenant Cope, and five men of "D" Company were wounded when an 88-millimetre shell struck two portees. For some reason the "Priests" were five minutes late with the barrage, which was not well distributed, and a smoke screen which had been planned failed to materialise. The Battalion advanced from cover when the barrage ended and made for its objectives, but there was no opposing fire. The Germans, having checked the advance, had withdrawn to a new rearward position. The Fusiliers continued to move forward among the foothills, searching for the enemy. The German mobile 88-millimetre battery made a fighting withdrawal, striking as time and opportunity allowed. At 4 p.m. the 6th Seaforth became the spearhead of the Brigade, followed by the Fusiliers less "D" Company.

In the late afternoon the 6th Seaforth passed through the Scots Fusiliers and entered Augusta, which had been shelled all day by a British and a Greek destroyer. The Fusiliers left the roadway and marched on through the night over ground to the west of the city until, at 4.30 in the morning of July 13, they occupied the heights above the rocky walls of the harbour. Two major ports had now been taken by the 17th Brigade in three days of fighting and 1,000 prisoners had been captured. Casualties had not been heavy, although the Scots Fusiliers had lost three officers of field rank.

2nd Bn: Advance to the Simeto

The Scots Fusiliers rested on the hills overlooking Augusta while the 15th Brigade went on down the road to Lentini and encountered the Schmaltz group a few miles south of Villasamundo, but a Battalion brought up from the 13th Brigade in Meliui to attack at night was not required as the Germans had withdrawn. The 15th Brigade concentrated in the Villasamundo area for several days, lending some artillery to the 50th Division which had hastened forward from the beaches to assist a group of British paratroops holding a bridgehead over the Simeto River at the Prima Sole bridge.

On the cliffs of Augusta, where the Scots Fusiliers were temporarily situated, Colonel MacInnes proposed to the Regimental Chaplain, the Reverend Father P. Bluett, that he should hold a religious service to give thanks for the Battalion's success. Father Bluett, who became after the war a parish priest in Yorkshire, was liked and admired by all ranks both for his breadth of outlook and his personal courage. He was decorated for his services with the Battalion stretcher-bearers at Alfadena some months later. The Padre, who was subsequently to fulfil his chief ambition, to say Mass under the dome of St. Peters in Rome, tells in his own words the story of the service at Augusta:

"During the service I recalled to memory those who had recently made the supreme sacrifice, asked the congregation to pray for their souls, to pray for the wounded and implore the Lord's protection on the Battalion.

"The service was held in an open field. The local people were overjoyed at being asked to erect an altar and quite a number of them joined the congregation on that occasion. After Mass I read the prayers for the dead. Quite a few of those present were deeply moved. Afterwards, the Colonel complimented me on the service. God be merciful to him. We were good friends."

The Scots Fusiliers remained on the heights above Augusta for four days. During that period there was some sniping and parachutist activity by German troops brought in haste from France. The fighting, however, was receding northwards. On the night of July 14 a carrier patrol from

“B” Company, investigating some positions among the heights, found no Germans, but rounded up 50 Italian prisoners and discovered four 6-in. guns and some machine guns in usable condition; while “A” Company on a similar mission came upon an abandoned store of weapons and ammunition.

While the 17th Brigade was carrying out these clearance duties, the other brigades of the 5th Division were advancing and meeting opposition. The advance of the 15th Brigade had now sealed off the Augusta peninsula. On July 13 it had a sharp encounter with the Schmaltz group and lost some Sherman tanks and armoured cars in a ravine south of Villasamundo, but eventually entered the town as the Germans withdrew and remained there for some days. The 13th Brigade, not involved at Villasamundo, took up the divisional advance, skirted the towns of Carlentini and Lentini, and following the axis of the 50th Division reached the high ground overlooking the Primo Sole Bridge.

On July 17th the Fusiliers moved at one hour’s notice northeastwards to Villasamundo, and on July 18 took up a defensive position north of Lentini. This proved an eventful day. At 2 p.m. two civilians were arrested wearing parachutists’ equipment, and since airborne landings were known to be part of the German technique of delaying tactics the men were escorted to Brigade Headquarters for interrogation. An hour later misfortune overtook the Scots Fusiliers when an outbreak of fire destroyed 29 vehicles of the Battalion transport, a major disaster resulting in the death of an officer. The transport was camouflaged with netting and parked in a wood near Lentini. Grass and undergrowth were tinder-dry and no fires nor smoking were permitted. By some mischance the grass suddenly burst into flame, the netting caught fire and trucks and lorries began to burn. Tremendous efforts were made by the drivers to extricate the vehicles and Lieutenant R. Lindsay went to help them. An ammunition truck exploded at that moment and he was struck by flying fragments and killed. Colonel MacInnes and his second-in-Command, Major J. H. Duncan, were slightly injured. Part of the next day was spent in reorganising transport loads, and in the evening the Battalion moved north again to link up with the 15th Brigade, which had maintained contact with the enemy since the capture of Syracuse.

2nd Bn: The battle for Catania

The Division was now nearing the loops of the Simeto river, and on the afternoon of July 18 the 13th Brigade began to advance to the river line while the rest of the Division was moving up. The Inniskillings found an intact bridge at Paso del Sico, known to the Division as “Lemon Bridge”, and the whole Battalion crossed by night after subduing a small enemy post. It was fiercely counter-attacked by German paratroops, who had withdrawn from the bridge temporarily to allow for an artillery concentration and had then been sent back. The Wiltshires secured a smaller bridgehead further downstream, from which they made contact with Canadian tanks attached to the both Division. At about this time the Germans broke through between the two Battalions, led by Tiger tanks, but were turned back by the Cameronians in reserve. The British guns, back in “Messerschmitt Valley”, were out of range and were brought forward into an exposed position to support a night attack by the 15th Brigade intended to enlarge the 13th’s bridgehead over Lemon Bridge. During the night the three Yorkshire Battalions of the 15th Brigade were badly shattered, one of the casualties being Captain Hedley Verity, the famous cricketer, who died in captivity. At daylight on July 19 the whole brigade was caught in the

middle of the Catanian Plain and was heavily shelled by German artillery firing from Mount Etna. The survivors managed to withdraw to a more favourable position. In the meantime the 13th Brigade had moved to its right to establish firm contact with the both Division. This was the situation when the Scots Fusiliers arrived on the River Simeto from Lentini. The 13th Brigade was withdrawn and rested before being sent westward to come under command of the 51st (Highland) Division. The 17th Brigade, plus one Battalion of the 15th Brigade, entered the divisional line on the night of July 21/22, the Scots Fusiliers relieving the 2nd Cameronians of the 13th Brigade. "C" and "D" Companies were forward, with "A" and "B" Companies in reserve. On the left were the 1st King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry of the 15th Brigade, and on the right the 2nd Northamptonshires.

It was now evident that the direct road to Catania over- the Simeto was barred, at a point only six miles distant from the town. Any attempt to reach Catania by crossing the intervening rivers on the plain, which were completely overlooked by artillery observation posts on Etna and stoutly defended, was clearly impracticable. Instead, General Montgomery decided to skirt round the Plain of Catania, wheeling XXX Corps on the pivot of XIII Corps, which was ordered to remain active on the line of the Simeto to conceal the real intention. So far XXX Corps, which had landed on July 10/11 with other forces on the Pachino Peninsula to secure the left flank of XIII Corps and to maintain contact with the American Seventh Army, had not been much engaged.

Catania was so tantalisingly close as to give the feeling that even if it could not be rushed it might be entered by stealth. The condition of the roads for wheeled and tracked traffic had deteriorated, and prospects of a successful attack across country by tanks were not improved by a network of irrigation and drainage ditches which made a geometrical pattern on the plain. In particular, one long ditch, the Fossa Botticelli, which lay about two miles beyond the Simeto river, was too deep for armour to cross or, once in, to get out of. Night patrolling by the Scots Fusiliers, and resultant encounters with an enemy bent on holding his ground by means of scattered posts and counter-patrol, became a regular routine. The British artillery, reinforced daily from the ports and beaches, was deployed in a wide arc round the perimeter of the Catania Plain, on the heights to the south-west and even in pits on the lower levels. The guns were continuously in action, day and night. The two-mile front line was held by the 17th Brigade, with under command a company of the Cheshire Regiment, which supplied the machine gun support for ten days without relief while infantry reliefs were drawn from the 15th Brigade. A gap of six miles between the two Corps, XXX and XIII, was filled by the 5th Reconnaissance Regiment, which was disposed roughly along the line of the Gornalunga river, one of the several tributaries of the Simeto.

There could be no activity by day in the infantry positions sited near Lemon Bridge, where the Scots Fusiliers and the other Battalions lay, and no movement was possible on the highway to Catania. On the Brigade's first day in the line, Major R. B. Shakespear, the Brigade Major, a former adjutant of the Battalion and a survivor of the Ypres-Comines Canal, had driven up the road in his jeep in the afternoon and had been instantly spotted and killed by accurate shellfire. Transport ventured near Lemon Bridge only at night, and all rations and stores had to be manhandled up to the forward companies. Before first light on July 23 the Fusiliers sent forward a standing patrol with orders to remain in position at a cross-roads a mile or so north-east of the bridge. Movement was impossible during the day in this exposed and vulnerable position, which served as a listening post sending back valuable information by wireless. After nightfall,

however, patrols were able to probe further into the enemy front and so build up the picture of the defences. One of these patrols, consisting of Lieutenant W. B. Thom and 12 other ranks of "A" Company, and equipped with a wireless set, set out with the object of investigating the spreading apron of Etna in the area unsuccessfully attacked by the 15th Brigade, about a mile forward of the standing patrol. The patrol was repulsed by the Germans, who opened heavy machine gun fire and counter-attacked with a strong force which cut off the officer and two men. Lieutenant Thorn was wounded and captured, but the others escaped after a running fight. The Germans went on to drive in the standing patrol at the crossroads, which managed to return to the Battalion lines, bringing in the wounded non-commissioned officer in charge. On the left flank a patrol from "C" Company ran into trouble on the same night, and withdrew after difficulty. Clearly the Germans were moving up from the foothills after dark in sufficient numbers to safeguard their front on the plain against night raids. To meet strength with strength "A" Company was sent out in force on the night of July 23/24 to seek out enemy positions in an orchard on the forward slopes on the far side of the plain, about a mile and a half to the north-west of the crossroads where the standing patrol had been stationed. Captain Pettigrew was in command, taking with him Lieutenant Grant as second-in-command and 35 men. The possibility of vehicles crossing the Fossa Botticelli, which stretched for miles across the plain in front of the suspected enemy positions, was to be examined as part of the general task. A moon which at first gave some help to the patrol clouded over, and the ditch was reached in complete darkness. There was no enemy interference at first, although the party had to "freeze" once or twice when flares went up. The ditch was found to offer no possible passage for tracked vehicles, and Captain Pettigrew sent over Lieutenant Grant with a section to carry out the main task. This move startled the enemy and rapid fire dispersed the section, which withdrew covered by the remainder of the patrol. Mortar bombs began to fall. It was evident that the Fossa constituted the advanced line of the German position, and Captain Pettigrew decided that his information was complete. A check of numbers disclosed that two men were missing. The alarm had now been raised, however, and in face of the enemy fire it was impossible to recross the ditch. The patrol ultimately made its way back to the Battalion and reported the positions of German machine guns, which were heavily shelled.

On the night of July 24/25 "B" Company went out to the crossroads and explored an area about one mile to the northeast, where it detected movement of vehicles near a group of buildings, and was itself shelled by the enemy. One of the two Fusiliers missing from the "A" Company patrol returned to the Battalion through the 1st K.O.Y.L.I. lines on the left flank. He reported German anti-tank vehicles concealed in haystacks near Pulverino farm, where his companion was lying wounded. "D" Company, which had relieved "C" Company in its exposed position, continued the night patrolling in the area north-east of the crossroads, and on July 26 re-established the standing patrol, which returned with no incident to report. A sortie of Kittyhawk aircraft bombed the orchards and the lower slopes beyond the ditch. Another standing patrol from "A" Company was sent out before dawn on July 27. That night the Fusiliers were relieved by the 6th Seaforth and went into Brigade reserve. German shelling followed them and some casualties were suffered. On July 28 four officers and 43 other ranks arrived as reinforcements. The first break in the weather since the landings on July 10 now occurred, and drenching rain fell. Visibility was reduced, Mount Etna became shrouded in mist and enemy gunfire died down.

Although the Battalion was now in reserve, patrolling continued. There was much enemy sniping. The back areas had not been thoroughly searched, and Germans and Italians who had

been left behind during the enemy withdrawal over the Simeto were acquiring a considerable nuisance value by their guerilla tactics. The inhabitants who had remained in their homes to the south of the river had recently been evacuated, both for their own safety and in the interests of military security. The clearance was continued at night by means of "box" patrols, routed from the Battalion base out to the enemy line, along the front and thence back behind the Battalion lines to a depth of about 1,000 yards. On one night of the period in

reserve a section of "A" Company undertook this task. The patrol consisted of a sergeant and nine men, including Fusilier Lee, who was notoriously hard of hearing. The patrol proved uneventful until the fourth side of the "box" was being covered, a length of ditch situated well in rear of the Battalion lines. Behind this ditch, unknown to the section, was a battery of "Priests" ready to fire a concentration. At the very moment when the patrol was moving under the guns the battery opened fire with shattering explosions. Whereupon Fusilier Lee flung himself flat in the ditch with loud imprecations. "Yon — snipers!" he said.

On the night of July 31/August 1 the Scots Fusiliers returned to the line to relieve the 2nd Northamptonshires on the right of Lemon Bridge, and patrols from "A", "C" and "D" Companies were able to confirm a slackening of enemy resistance on the Catania Plain. The XXX Corps offensive was going well; Mussolini had abdicated; the town of Centuripe had capitulated to the 78th Division and it was clear that Catania could no longer hold out. General Montgomery was already planning to cross the Straits of Messina, employing the 5th Division and the 1st Canadian Division. The 5th was now under command of Major-General G. C. Bucknall, in succession to Major-General H. P. M. Berney-Ficklin, M.C., who had been with the Division since the outbreak of war, first as commander of the 15th Brigade, and after Dunkirk as Divisional Commander following General Sir Harold Franklyn.

On August 4 the 5th and 50th Divisions together set out eastwards across the plain from the Simeto. Catania was the objective of the 50th Division, while the 5th Division moved north-westwards towards the Etna foothills with the 17th Brigade on the right and the 5th on the left. The forward troops of the 17th Brigade were the Seaforth and the Northamptonshires, with the Scots Fusiliers in reserve. South of Misterbianco, almost due west of Catania, the Seaforth were pressing the enemy so closely that the German rearguards turned, and there was a short engagement. The Scots Fusiliers, four miles from Misterbianco and still in Brigade reserve, spent the night astride the main axis route. A brigade attack on Misterbianco was mounted next morning. The line of advance on the left was assigned to the Seaforth, to be followed by the Fusiliers. The Battalion was on the move by 5 a.m., "C" Company leading. At 6.15 a.m. Misterbianco, a small hill town of several thousand inhabitants, was reported to be free of the enemy. The Germans had withdrawn, having obtained the night's respite for their main forces, which were now retiring on Messina and beginning their flight across the straits to Calabria on the Toe of Italy. The Brigade pushed on through the town, under orders to maintain contact with the German rearguards. All three Battalions were soon in position on the hills to the north and east. The Fusiliers sent a strong patrol from "A" Company under Company Sergeant-Major J. Howie up the road to Paterno. This patrol was ambushed, and Fusilier Aitken wounded and taken prisoner. Patrolling activities continued until August 8, when the 5th Division was withdrawn from the line to prepare for the assault on the Italian mainland. The pursuit on a contracted front between mountain and sea permitted the use of only one division, the 50th.

On August 5, at about the same time as the 5th Division occupied Paterno, the 51st Division, with a brigade of the 78th, cleared Blancaville, while the main body of the 78th reached the outskirts of Adrano. The countryside was a maze of mountains and close, high-walled ravines, and the enemy had used mines and destroyed the roads on an unprecedented scale. Adrano was captured, then Bronte, then Moletta, the last formidable stronghold, and Randazzo, where the 78th Division regained contact with the eastward bound Americans. XXX Corps was then taken out and the narrower front allotted to the 78th Division. XXX Corps was switched to the south, the 51st Division replacing the 5th Division in the line. The 5th, together with the headquarters of XIII Corps and the 1st Canadian Division, was ordered to refit and begin training exercises in readiness for the invasion of Italy.

The united strength of the Allied air and naval fleets was unable to prevent the withdrawal of German forces by night across the Straits of Messina although heavy casualties and damage were inflicted on them during daylight. The British land forces had to remain content with hastening the departure of the enemy by every destructive means at their disposal. Four days after the collapse of Randazzo the Allies entered Messina.

Enemy casualties in Sicily were 164,000 dead, wounded and prisoners, of whom 32,000 were German. About 1,500 aircraft, 78 tanks and armoured cars, 287 pieces of artillery, and 3,500 motor vehicles had been captured or destroyed. British casualties amounted to 2,721 killed, 7,939 wounded and 2,583 missing. The Americans had 5,233 killed, 4,695 wounded and 968 missing.

To the south of Mount Etna, concentrated about Misterbianco, Motta San Anastasia and westwards, the formations of the 5th Division prepared for the invasion of Italy. The Scots Fusiliers were stationed at Misterbianco, which the 57th Brigade had originally occupied before its duties in the line were taken over by units of the 51st Division. It was a pleasant relief to live in a town, with the simpler amenities of life restored; and the people there were friendly. Bathing parties visited the Mediterranean; reinforcements came forward, including Major P. S. Sandilands as Second-in-Command; and kit checks, conferences, medical inspections and artillery demonstrations helped to pass the days of waiting. A mobile cinema was available, and Church parades were held. The Battalion was delighted to learn at this time that Lieutenant-Colonel MacInnes had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order. Details of “Operation Baytown”, the invasion of Italy, had now been circulated, including the landing tables, and sand models of the Calabrian peninsula were closely studied. The Scots Fusiliers left Misterbianco, embarked at Catania on the night of September 2 and travelled by sea to a concentration area at Mili Marino.

Chapter IX

THE INVASION OF THE ITALIAN MAINLAND

—2nd Battalion—1943

The landing— The long march—Mountain operations—

Alfadena

Two Allied armies were to take part in the landings on the Italian mainland: the British Eighth Army was to cross into Calabria on September 3, and the American Fifth Army, under General Clark, to make a seaborne attack a week later on Salerno, south of Naples. Little resistance was

expected from the garrison of 180,000 Italian troops; but some 60,000 Germans had escaped to the mainland from Sicily, and reinforcements could be expected from the mass of manoeuvre which Hitler had concentrated under Rommel in the north. The Italians were virtually out of the war, Marshal Badoglio having already negotiated a secret peace with the Allies which was shortly to be announced.

For the landing in Calabria two divisions were to be employed. The 1st Canadian Division was to cross the Straits of Messina, seize the town of Reggio and advance up the east coast road. The 5th Division, landing in the neighbourhood of Villa San Giovanni, was to move north by the west coast road. The attacking formations of the 5th Division were to be the 13th Brigade to the south and the 17th Brigade to the north, with the 15th Brigade in reserve landing six hours later.

The leading Battalions of 17th Brigade were the 6th Seaforth on the right, and the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers on the left. Two leading platoons of the forward companies of Scots Fusiliers and Seaforth, each with a detachment of Royal Engineers, after landing, were to make a gap four feet wide through the antipersonnel minefields on the beaches. The Northamptonshires were to assist in the best way suggested by circumstances, in addition to maintaining the beachhead, while the Fusiliers and Seaforth moved north. The forward companies of the Fusiliers, "A" on the left, "B" on the right, were ordered to occupy the coastal hills, while "C" and "D" Companies were to enter Gallico. Afterwards, the Scots Fusiliers were to take the villages of Belfatta and Villa San Guiseppe and some surrounding high ground. A mortar platoon and a field battery were to support the Battalion. An artillery barrage and concentrated target fire was to be provided by 650 field and medium guns from positions in the Messina hills, and to progress in 50-yard lifts from beach to roadway; and while the field guns were thus dealing with the foreshore, the guns of *Warspite*, *Nelson*, *Rodney* and *Valiant* were to engage the coastal defences. Two-pounder guns, Oerlikons and rockets were to support "A" and "B" Companies with overhead fire when they approached to within 1,000 yards of the beaches. Allied air superiority had been guaranteed; but low-flying attacks by small sorties of enemy aircraft might still succeed, despite anti-aircraft protection.

2nd Bn: The landing

When the 13th and 17th Brigades of the 5th Division landed about Gallico Marina, and the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Canadian Division at Reggio to the south, they encountered no enemy troops, mines, barbed wire nor demolitions. A grenadier Battalion of the German 29th Motorised Division had withdrawn from Reggio on September 1, followed by the last troop of an 88-millimetre battery. The entire Italian garrison of the coastal defences, together with the local civilian population, emerged when the Allied gunfire ceased. The Canadian brigade moved on unopposed from Reggio by a route running through the middle of the Toe of Italy and turned towards the coast and the port of Locri. In the 5th Division the 15th Brigade took over the lead and drove along the main road to the north, while the 17th Brigade formed a defensive flank in the hills looking down to the sea. The German rearguard brigade, disposed in small groups, withdrew quietly up the Peninsula, at first making no show of retaliation.

Some of the minor vexations of Operation Baytown "were recorded shortly after it took place by Major (later Lieutenant-Colonel) Sandilands:

"I embarked ", he wrote, "in the landing craft with the Commanding Officer, the beachmaster, gunner officer [Major Price, R.A.] and others of the C.O.'s party. The engine broke down a quarter of a mile off shore. We shouted and flashed lamps to no avail. Meanwhile, we were drifting rapidly south-wards. We were, however, taken in tow by a Canadian landing craft. Eventually we crossed and started, only slightly late, having divided the landing craft party between the Canadian and another British craft. How the C.O. persuaded the Canadian landing craft commander to forsake his own task and take us over, I don't know.

"The artillery barrage started while we were halfway across the Straits. Aids to keeping direction were tracers fired by Bofors and pairs of searchlights on the Sicilian side, throwing their beams vertically. These pairs had to be kept lined up. It was perfectly obvious that the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve officer in our craft, which was leading, was losing direction and we were landed in the wrong place. We saw the shore and decided to go straight in. As we came in we saw a lamp which turned out to be a marker put down by the leading platoon of the assault companies. . . . One or two men of the platoon were on the beach and put us on to the tape marking the swept lane. A little way inland we found a section of the Fusiliers in thick undergrowth, who told us that the platoon commander, Lieutenant Thompson, was ahead with a section rounding up Italian soldiers. The C.O. told me to go ahead and contact them. The tape finished at this point, indicating that there might be mines. I asked for two men to come with me. The words were hardly out of my mouth when I had at least four men all eager to come.

"Day broke and all three Battalions of the 17th Brigade were marching and counter-marching to sort themselves out into their correct places. There was very little enemy shelling. I remember Sergeant Guthrie on his captured motor cycle and the willing Italian prisoners who pulled our handcarts and carried our gear."

2nd Battalion: *The long march*

To continue Major Sandilands' account:

"We took our first objective unopposed, but were spurred on by the Brigadier, who was somewhat impatient. We pushed inland. I remember the air-raid by four or five F.W. 190'S on Gallico Superior. This cleared the local barber's shop of 'Jocks', and I slipped in quickly and got shaved four hours after landing in a hostile country. There was also a most spectacular raid by F.W. 190'S on the beaches, which we watched from afar. All this time the weather was lovely, except for one torrential thunderstorm.

"We were withdrawn later, re-embarked and landed, not far from Palmi, on the north coast of the Toe. After that we marched averaging some 20 miles a day for about 8 to 10 days, during which there were maddening delays at demolitions, and we were covered with dust by passing guns and lorries. Finally we got to Nicastro, which was entered first by a carrier group composed of all carrier platoons in the Brigade and commanded by Colonel MacInnes. Those were quite astonishing days. The Italian population lined up to clap and cheer as we marched through the villages. Fruit and wine were thrown at us everywhere."

The serpentine road up the coast crossed two rivers of considerable size and innumerable ravines and gullies. It presented a supreme opportunity for the German genius in military obstruction which had been perfected in Tunisia and Sicily. Mines were laid systematically, while Battalions of German engineers blew bridges, mined roads, ploughed up runways on aerodromes

and fired hangars. Teller mines were concealed even beneath sheep-tracks, and S-mines among the vineyards.

The Allied advance from the beachhead towards Potenza began, the 15th Brigade breaking out towards Scilla and Bagnara, and the leading Battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment reached Favazinna on the afternoon of September 4. On the previous evening a Commando unit had landed from the sea at Bagnara and had come into sharp collision with rear-guards of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division. The night of September 4/5 was spent in the neighbourhood of Bagnara. The last Italians to resist the 5th Division were encountered outside Cerimido by a patrol of the Green Howards. Deserters from the Italian army at this period were becoming a serious embarrassment. In order to circumvent the demolitions on the main roads the 13th Brigade resorted to using a railway tunnel at Bagnara, but congestion at the tunnel imposed so much delay that landing craft had to be used to ferry the brigade to the seaward flank of the 15th Brigade, landing them at a beach three miles south of Gioia on the morning of September 6. The 17th Brigade followed the 13th Brigade on September 7 in the same craft, while the 15th Brigade pushed on up the coastal road; and so the advance continued up the Tyrrhenian route, the main axis of the Eighth Army.

All three Battalions of the 17th Brigade in turn took the lead during 19 days of continuous marching, through Pizzo, Nicastro, Belvedere, Scalea and Maratea. Demolitions were encountered all along the way; and while the light wheeled traffic ranged as far afield as 20 miles from the route to find crossings over the rivers and ravines, the infantry forded where it could. The pace was increased by using the Battalion carriers and trucks to ferry the troops forward in relays over good patches. Transportation up the coast by sea was also used at times, but was impracticable for large numbers because of the scarcity of craft. The railway tracks, hitherto neglected by the German engineers were used as an alternative to the roads. This method of progress provided a variation, as at Bagnara, but did not materially increase the speed of advance.

By September 16 the 5th Division was assembled on the Gulf of Policastro within the triangle formed by the villages of Lagonegro, Sapri and Maratea. Patrols sent out to westward had met in the vicinity of Valle di Lucania on the coast elements of the American VI Corps, which had landed at Salerno. On the Adriatic, the Canadians, who had not had to deal with demolitions nor resistance, had joined the 1st Airborne Division near Metaponto on the Gulf of Taranto. Taranto itself had been seized in a separate operation by the Airborne Division. XIII Corps was ordered to seize Potenza, an important focal point for German rearward communications, as a means of meeting any threat to the Salerno beachhead. The 5th Division moved inland up the Diano Valley in which flows the Tanagro River. On September 20 the 15th Brigade entered Brigenza at the head of the valley, while on the same day the 3rd Canadian Brigade, moving further to the west, secured Potenza, which had been heavily bombed. The Royal Engineers immediately began to restore the road between Brigenza and Potenza so as to re-link the 5th Division with the Canadians.

There ensued a short pause in operations, during which XIII Corps assumed a relatively passive role in protection of the American Fifth Army's right flank. The crisis at Salerno was over; the three provinces of Calabria, Lucania and Apulia, as well as Foggia and its airfields, were in the possession of the Eighth Army. All this had been achieved in 27 days. The first phase of the Italian campaign was over and the Allies were now established on the continent of Europe. At this time it appeared likely that the enemy might abandon Rome and retire swiftly northwards,

obstructing and delaying in one position after another until the powerful Rimini-Pisa Line was occupied, where he would make a stand. Three days after the Allied entry into Naples, however, it became apparent that the Germans had resolved to remain in Rome and were bringing down heavy reinforcements from the north.

In an Order of the Day issued to all troops of the Eighth Army on October 23, the anniversary of Alamein, General Montgomery said: "The battle now about to begin will be the turning point of the war; it will be one of the decisive battles of history.... The final phases may be long and difficult but in the distance we can now see complete and absolute victory. If anything is certain in this life, it is clear that we shall win this war."

Meanwhile the American Fifth Army, freed from the Salerno Bridgehead, was making progress through Campagna, and in mid-October General Montgomery regrouped his British and Canadian forces. V Corps was sent to the right sector between the coast and Larino. XIII Corps, composed of the 5th and 1st Canadian Divisions, was to be employed in the central highlands. The first of the autumn thunderstorms fell on the Fusiliers encamped north of Potenza, where they had moved from Brigenza on October 1. The Battalion carriers had been parked in a dry river-bed; this was now transformed into a rushing torrent, and when orders were received to move across the mountains to a new concentration area on the Plain of Foggia every man in the unit was pressed into service to extricate the vehicles, which had to be dragged to the highway by portees. The Battalion moved off in transport in the 17th Brigade column on October 4, and bivouacked for the night in the area of Minervino. Next day, after a total journey of 130 miles, but with only 20 miles on good roads, the Battalion reached Troia, 12 miles to the south of the ruins of the town of Foggia. The Allies were expecting a counter-attack, and in that event the operational area of the Scots Fusiliers was to be to the east of Troia, in a countryside of rolling plain and low foothills, devoid of cover. No attack came, but a standing patrol was established in the Orsara area. As the fighting moved further away, intensive training began. The programme included company marches lasting 36 hours, a cross-country tour, cadre training, tactical study periods for officers of all ranks, weapon and range practices, and practice in co-operation with other arms and services. In addition one Brigade exercise," Chianti ", was held to practise the Battalion in acting as advanced guard to the Brigade when moving through hilly country on a single axis.

The personal and technical associations which the Scots Fusiliers formed with the divisional artillery in the course of the Troia manoeuvres were to prove of great value in future operations. A close bond already existed between the Fusiliers and "R" Battery 593 of the 156th (Lanarkshire Yeomanry) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery. It had originated in Iran in the autumn of 1942, from which time the two units remained side by side to the end of the war. This battery had taken the place of 142 Battery of the 9th Field Regiment, which

had been rendered ineffective by blackwater fever in Madagascar, where it had served in support of the 17th Brigade. The Lanarkshire Yeomanry had fought as the 12th Royal Scots Fusiliers in the first World War. In Sicily the mobile" Priests "had supported the 2nd Battalion, but from the landing in Italy onwards "R Battery, under the command of Major F. W. Batey, M.C., took over that special duty. Batey, who was to lose his life at Anzio, and Cocks, his Battery Captain, were members of the Fusiliers mess.

At Troia a sports meeting was held by way of relaxation, at which the main attraction was a mule race. Mountain warfare in Italy was about to restore the mule train to its traditional place in

the transport of the British Army. Mules were in short supply, and the rules of the race admitted any quadruped which could support a jockey. Sergeant Guthrie ran a "book" on the event, for which there were 15 entrants. The Colonel and Father Bluett had chargers; the Adjutant, Captain A. M. L. MacFarlan, rode a Shetland pony; while the rest of the starters consisted of an assortment of donkeys and mules. The course extended from a tape at the top of a field down to a turning point, and measured 500 yards. Most of the riders were literally "off" at the start, and every runner took a different direction. Father Bluett was dragged a considerable distance along the ground by his charger, and only the Adjutant on his Shetland pony, which he steered by keeping his feet on the ground, finished the course. It took him 10 minutes.

Immediate awards for the Sicilian campaign were announced on October 7. Major J. H. Duncan and Captain J. H. F. MacMichael were awarded the Military Cross and Lance-Sergeants W. Dunlop, R. Moore and W. Morning the Military Medal. Later in the month news was received that Colonel MacInnes had been mentioned in despatches for his part in the Madagascar campaign.

Meanwhile the 1st Canadian Division had been vigorously engaged. It had opened up the road from Vinchiaturo, which commanded the approaches to Isernia, fighting hard all the way through San Stefano, Barranello, Campochiaro, Spinete and Castropignano. The 5th Division now became the vanguard of XIII Corps, leaving the Canadians to form a secure base for a move by the 13th Brigade into Isernia itself, an important centre of communications guarding a pass into the basin of the Appenines.

2nd Battalion: Mountain operations

The German defences stretched from Termoli on the Adriatic over high country to the Volturno River north of Mount Massico on the Tyrrhenian coast. The Eighth Army reopened its offensive on these ramparts, driving northwards from Foggia across the Trigno River and westwards into the maze of mountains up Highway 17, which led to Isernia. XIII Corps followed the inland route. On October 25 the Scots Fusiliers moved to Vinchiaturo, south of Campobasso, with the object of replacing a Battalion of the Canadians which had been operating among the mountain villages on peaks reaching to a height of 4,000 feet. Vinchiaturo stood at the junction of four ways. From Vinchiaturo to Termoli, Motta and Castel di Sangro there was a good road; but the routes to Spinete, Macchiagodena and Motiso were either by rough tracks or across the open mountain sides.

The Vinchiaturo road has been described thus by Eric Linklater: "This was an easy road on the plain. But when it left the plain and the open, cultivated eastern hill slopes, it climbed into a stern country of ridges and ravines, the hillsides wooded or obscured by scrub and fortress villages on commanding heights. The road turned and twisted, the villages looked down upon it and the village houses were built of such stout masonry that field guns battered them in vain. Behind such walls in such country, a few riflemen and a pair of machine guns could very easily delay advancing troops while a gunner's observer brought fire from distant batteries that compelled them to deploy. The opponents were the 1st Parachute Division on their long hill line from Serracadiola down towards Aciano; and their purpose, in the early days of October, was to gain time while the right wing of their army withdrew behind the Volturno. Minefields, and the

defence of villages superbly sited for defence, were the means they used to achieve their purpose”.

For two days of fine weather the Battalion camped in the olive groves at Vinchiaturo, before moving on to Spinete, one of the hill villages, to relieve Princess Patricia's Light Infantry. In heavy rain and mist, which greatly reduced visibility, they moved in transport to Baranella, and then, as the road from Bijano to Spinete was under constant shellfire, continued on foot by steep and muddy tracks to the high ground west of the village. Patrols of “B” and “C” Companies occupied the allotted position on the night of October 27/28 and reported no sign of enemy activity. The 5th Division was now in position to advance and attack Isernia, Forli and Alfadena.

For the next few days the energies of the Fusiliers were absorbed by a mountain feature with the difficult name of Macchiagodena. It was wild country, with enemy machine gun and mortar posts invisible among the scrub which clung to the slopes about the village of Spinete, itself high among the clouds. In this area a fighting patrol from the Battalion had its first encounter with the enemy. Rain fell heavily on the night of October 28/29, bringing discomfort and disorganisation by delaying the artillery and supply convoys for several hours. The vehicles had to be towed out of the mud, an experience with which the Fusiliers were to become very familiar. This caused the postponement of an attack on the heights north of Macchiagodena on October 29, but conditions were favourable enough for aircraft to bomb and machine-gun suspected enemy posts on the mountain flanks. The fighting patrol, led by Lieutenant Coutts, found the enemy on the hill and inflicted some casualties. Next day the patrol went out again to destroy a machine gun post which they had discovered and this time lost a man in the engagement, but the artillery, now forward, and aircraft bombarded the located enemy position. The 2nd Northamptonshires had by now worked round to their objective, which lay to the north of Macchiagodena, but in spite of support from artillery and air a machine gun post was still active in the hill-top village. This was silenced on October 30 after an attack by “C” Company, supported by three detachments of 3-inch mortars, a platoon of 4.2-inch mortars and a battery of the 78th Field Regiment. The enemy withdrew his centre of resistance to the next mountain feature, and this had to be approached with some caution in case it concealed a substantial reserve ready to counter-attack. “A” Company with difficulty climbed the feature, which was 3,000 feet high and so steep that mules were required to carry the heavy equipment; but finally gained its objective, described on the map as Point 1385. In this way the Scots Fusiliers continued to make hard-won progress westwards through the Pesco Pella Messa to San Angelo.

By October 28 all the Canadian positions astride the Isernia road had been taken over by the 5th Division. The weather was dismal, with cloud in the hills and frost and morning fog in the valleys. While the 17th Brigade was closing in on San Angelo the 13th Brigade was also making progress to the southwest on the ranges of the Matese Mountains, and had surrounded Massimo and Cantalupo on October 30 and entered Roccamandolfi on the last day of the month. Enemy demolitions on the limited routes were so numerous that for two days all the engineer resources of the 5th Division were employed in clearing obstacles and rebuilding roadways, which restricted other movement to patrolling.

Meanwhile the 17th Brigade had encountered fresh trouble in its advance on the right of the Isernia road. The Seaforth, attacking Point 1162 to the north of San Angelo, found the Germans there in strength. Although driven back, the enemy returned again in force and made a strong counter-attack, supported by mortars, driving the Seaforth from the mountain with heavy

casualties. The Scots Fusiliers were that day engaged in deep patrolling; but were hurriedly called upon to send first the Battalion fighting patrol, and next morning the whole of "C" Company, to occupy a gap which had opened between the 17th Brigade and the 1st Canadian Brigade to the west. The Fusiliers were given the task of restoring the situation on Point 1162, and the Brigadier decided to stage an attack of large scale on the mountain position, supported by all available artillery. The attack was timed for first light (6.15 a.m.) on November 3. "B" Company was to assault on the right and "D" Company on the left, with "C" Company in reserve. Battalion Headquarters was to be forward with "C" Company. The artillery concentration was planned on an exceptional scale; all the guns of the 5th Division were to be used for a lifting barrage and for opportunity targets, while machine guns were to give covering fire to the assault from the adjacent Point 1281, and heavy mortars to engage targets forward of the objective. The Sessano and Carpinone areas, in which the German artillery was concealed, were to be saturated from the air. However the final plan, which eventually brought success, was made by Colonel MacInnes. From a personal reconnaissance made from Point 1281 on the previous day, he had come to the conclusion that the German dispositions were specifically prepared to meet attack from the east, the direction of the unsuccessful assault by the Seaforth, and he therefore decided to switch his axis of attack to the south. This entailed a long march across high ground in the dark to reach the start line, with the further complication of lack of time.

In the evening of November 2 the Fusiliers set out from the St. Elena area on their long night march, led by the Battalion fighting patrol and following tapes laid across the hills by Lieutenant Sharp, the Intelligence Officer, and his section. Thanks to the efficiency of the tape-laying party the Battalion was on its start line by 5.45 a.m., just as the barrage opened, despite the long and difficult approach. There had been incidents on the way, some of which were caused by the temperamental mule train in charge of Major Duncan and Captain Northcott; but not all. Companies were led in single file by their seconds-in-command, as all company commanders were forward with the Commanding Officer. "A" Company, bringing up the rear with the regimental aid post, lost touch with the tail of the company in front. After some alarm, however, the missing troops appeared again out of the night. There was also some shelling, after the files left the road; but this passed overhead, and was probably aimed at one of the large demolition sites where the enemy could expect troops to be at work.

The attack was launched at 6.30 a.m. on November 3. Some of the shells of the supporting artillery fell among the advancing platoons and at first it was thought that casualties were heavy, but luckily they were limited to four, Lieutenant Clark and three others. These were to be the only casualties. As the attack pressed on and upwards, the German mortar fire was seen to be falling in the valley to the east which the Scots Fusiliers would have been crossing at that moment if the original plan had been followed. The attacking companies were moving so quickly that a temporary halt was called for purposes of control and caution. By 7 a.m., however, "B" and "D" Companies were on the crest, and the position was consolidated on front and flanks when "C" Company joined them from reserve. It was still early morning, and success was rapidly exploited. "C" Company made for the next hill, Point 1144, under covering fire from the mortar detachments, but found that the enemy, upset by the surprise thrust from the south, had gone. Some movement in a valley to the west after mid-day supported this view, and the enemy's withdrawal was hastened by artillery fire. The sounds of heavy demolitions, the usual symptoms of German departure, were audible all that day; and at nightfall the Battalion settled down to rest

in its hilltop positions. The War Diary observes: "The weather was fine during the day but very cold and damp at night..., as rations and greatcoats did not arrive by mule train until 1900 hours." Fearing encirclement, the Germans had fallen back on Isernia, which was occupied next day. The road was thus opened for the 13th Brigade, on the left of the Isernia road, to move into San Angelo and Castelpetrossa.

Next day, the Fusiliers sent out deep patrols to the north. One of these, under Sergeant Moore, returned with two prisoners who were identified as belonging to the 67 Panzer Grenadier Regiment and to the 9th Panzer Engineer Regiment, both of the 26th Division, one of the notable German formations which had been opposing the 5th Division. This patrol also reported the apparent evacuation of Sassano, eight miles north of San Angelo. On the night of November 4/5 the Battalion fighting patrol and another patrol consisting of a platoon from "B" Company ranged widely in search of the enemy. The "B" Company patrol, led by Lieutenant Cairns, spent seven hours in Sessano and on the surrounding heights, which were found deserted by the enemy. The railway to Sessano was found to have been completely destroyed in several places, which provided one explanation of the detonations heard on the day Point 1162 was occupied. No satisfactory explanation however could be found for a "ticking tank", discovered by Lieutenant Cairns and his patrol, which hastily gave it a very wide berth, suspecting—no doubt rightly—a German booby trap. On the same day Company Sergeant-Major Browse took out a patrol voluntarily to bring in a wounded German non-commissioned officer.

The 17th Brigade was now ordered to rest in the area it had gained, while the 5th Brigade took up the pursuit. A platoon of "D" Company of the Scots Fusiliers was given the task of covering the 15th Brigade's advance from one of the peaks, Point 826. The Fusiliers were now concentrated in the village of San Angelo, and they settled down comfortably in billets. The Colonel persuaded a corps of local women to act as laundry maids for his men; while another ingenuity was the acquisition for the Battalion of a private washing-machine, which was placed in charge of Regimental Sergeant-Major Rodger. This contrivance consisted of an abandoned German *Trinkwasser*, or mobile drinking-water tank, heated from underneath and connected to a number of home-made showers. Reinforcements of two officers and 35 other ranks arrived. Leave for 48 hours was granted for visits to the town of Campobasso; but it was still necessary to keep platoons posted on the high ground north of San Angelo.

The weather was now deteriorating. It was nearly always raining, and fierce storms of sleet and snow swirled round the cliffs of San Angelo. About the middle of the month the Brigadier and Colonel MacInnes set out to reconnoitre the forward areas towards the headwaters of the Trigno, and news that further operations might be imminent spread through the ranks of the Battalion. The first attempt to breach the German Winter Line, known also as the Gustav or Helene Line, which barred the road to the north, was to be made by the crossing of the River Sangro. Thousands of conscripted Italians had laboured at the construction of this Winter Line, which ran from the mouth of the River Sangro on the Adriatic to the mouth of the River Garigliano on the Tyrrhenian Sea. It was an intricate system of concrete pillboxes, fortified farmhouses and villages, skilfully sited machine gun and mortar emplacements, minefields and forests of wire, which stretched in places to a depth of 20 miles. It was not intended to be a check line to impose delay, but a barrier as impregnable as natural obstacles and military engineering could make it. In this intention the weather assisted the enemy, as snow and sleet fell incessantly all over Southern Italy. Torrential rain delayed the Allied attack, which opened with a crossing of

the Sangro River from Torino near the Adriatic coast. In this operation the object of the Eighth Army was to turn the eastern flank of the Winter Line, to drive at Chisti in the mountains, and then to turn westwards down the Pescara road towards Avezzano so as to threaten the German communications behind the Fifth Army. The intention of the Fifth Army was to converge simultaneously on Camino and so open the Liri valley and the way to Rome. There was also to be an amphibious landing south of Rome, and a final advance on the capital.

The role of the 5th Division in this plan was to undertake a diversionary operation. The enemy was to be deluded into the belief that the Eighth Army's main thrust would be made not on the Adriatic coast but in the mountains in the neighbourhood of Castel di Sangro and Alfadena. In order to further this deception ostentatious preparations were made in the Abruzzi mountains, including the creation of counterfeit Army Headquarters and dummy gun positions, deceptive activity on the roads and the deliberate leakage of misleading information. The operation was to be based on Cerro, in the approximate direction taken earlier by the 15th Brigade. The 17th Brigade's duty was to open the axis from Cerro to Alfadena and then to strike north-westwards, the Fusiliers acting as spearhead, with "A" Company of the 2nd Northamptonshires and "C"

Company of the 2nd Cheshires under command, giving the Battalion six companies in all. Artillery support was to be provided by the 156th Field Regiment (Lanarkshire Yeomanry) in addition to the divisional artillery and two other field and one medium regiments. Because of foul weather the operation was postponed from November 18 to November 21; but on November 19, when final administrative details were being adjusted, the sun broke through the clouds.

2nd Battalion: Alfadena

The town of Alfadena lay at the foot of the peaks of the Abruzzi range, beside a roadway contorted by the conformation of hills and streams. Peaks rose on every side, crowned by the cone of Mount Civitalta to the north, and the lower hills were heavily wooded or covered with scrub. The town was skirted by the Torto, a tributary of the River Sangro, into which it flowed towards the north-east, a mile away. The mountain barriers to the east, from which the 17th Brigade attack was approaching, were numbered thus from south to north on the map: Point 1086, Point 1192, Point 1233 and Point 1168. A subsidiary road, parallel to Highway 17 and linking the hill villages, ran amongst the foothills of these mountains, all nearly as high as Ben Nevis. On the approach from the east, which was to be used by the rifle companies, there was no road surface and no signposts. A more direct route lay over other mountains: Mount Fosse, Point 1252, Point 1152, Point 1155, and Point 1168 which guarded Alfadena to the east. A track running north of Mount Fosse, over the shoulder of Point 1252 and thence to the village of Montenero, five miles to the east of Alfadena, was the only route to the inner line of enemy defences. The British artillery lines were sited in a narrow, swampy valley near Rionero to the south, packed almost wheel to wheel and enduring heavy casualties from German 17 centimetre guns, firing from distant positions. In this adverse situation the supporting fire of the field regiments was nevertheless consistently punctual and accurate.

The Scots Fusiliers left their concentration area at C  rro and were able to travel in motor transport until a certain crossroads was reached on the road to Ischia, the supply centre for the operation, whence they had to continue on foot, as the highway was blown in many places and passable only to jeeps and mules. Mules figured prominently in this operation; the Battalion was

completely dependent on two troops, totalling 120 animals, for all its tactical and administrative loads, and in view of this instructions were issued to be economical with ammunition. Two patrols pushed forward, a Fusilier patrol under Lieutenant Biden and a reconnaissance patrol from the 2nd Northamptonshires with orders to explore Point 1086, the most southerly of the Alfadena features. The Battalion tapping party set out at the same time under the Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Sharp, with the additional duty of reporting on the state of Point 1252. The Battalion followed at 1 a.m.

The plan was to attack at dawn through a gap between Mount Fosse and Point 1260, both occupied by troops of the 5th Division. The last stretch of the approach from the forming-up place to the start line was over rocky, wooded slopes, difficult to traverse, and as a result zero hour had to be delayed by 15 minutes. Communications with Brigade Headquarters failed, either because the wireless equipment was sodden or because it had been damaged by jolting on the mules. At 6.15 a.m., notwithstanding the difficulties of the approach, the attacking companies, "A" on the right and "C" on the left, went forward; "B" Company followed with the Commanding Officer at its head, and "D" Company remained in reserve. The prearranged artillery concentration opened and the Germans replied vigorously, shelling the track and the gap for two hours and sending everyone to ground. Eventually "A" Company arrived on its objective to the right of Point 1252. "C" Company was halted by machine gun fire halfway up the face of the same peak, but could not call for artillery support, having no communication, and carried on unsupported to the summit, reinforced by "B" Company. Point 1252 cost seven casualties; two prisoners were taken. The 2nd Northamptonshires occupied Point 1086 in the afternoon without opposition. German shell-fire was causing casualties, but wireless contact had now been restored and the two southerly bastions, inner and outer, of Alfadena had been captured.

The other features to the north, Points 1192 and 1155, and the village of Montenero, were patrolled that night. Point 1192 was found clear, but Montenero and Point 1155 were still held by the Germans. "B" Company occupied the deserted Point 1192 before 7 a.m. on November 22. "D" Company, ordered to clear Point 1155 shortly after mid-day, swept over its objective and went on to capture Point 1233, overlooking Alfadena from the south-east. Enemy shell-fire was observed falling on Point 1168, which looked directly down on Alfadena, by the Brigadier and Colonel MacInnes, who had climbed Point 1233 after its occupation by "D" Company. Point 1233 was so densely covered with timber that it was considered impossible to hold it with safety. November 22 ended with "D" Company in position on a spur west of Point 1168; "A" and "C" Companies, with artillery observation officers in case of surprise, and a company of the 2nd Northamptonshires in place of "B" Company, on Point 1192. Thus on the second night of the operation the Scots Fusiliers were in complete command of the approaches to Alfadena. The town itself had been entered by patrols and its ruins reported empty. Barres, two miles to the north-west on the main highway across the Torto, had been reconnoitred by a long range patrol of the Fusiliers; and Montagnola, south of Alfadena, which had been reported by a Northamptonshire patrol to be strongly held, wired and mined, was now overlooked from the Scots Fusiliers position. The night of November 22/23 was one of incessant rain. Battalion Headquarters moved into Montenero and set up there with the ammunition point, while Royal Engineers were employed in removing German mines in the dark. The outposts of the German Winter Line opposite the Scots Fusiliers position were established on ridges and spurs which increased in height towards Castel di Sangro. The attack on Alfadena itself, and on the defended

hills backing the town, was deferred until nightfall in view of the strength in artillery of the German force, which was now the 305th Division, and the observation it enjoyed during daylight over the whole valley.

An exposed track led down from the wooded slopes of the high eastern features and across the valley bottom to Alfadena and beyond. Being an obvious axis for movement in daylight or dark, it had been carefully registered for harassing fire by the Germans and was shelled at intervals as a matter of routine. However it would have to be used in the initial stages of any attempt on the fortified hills on the far side of the Torto or the Sangro. At Alfadena the River Sangro was little more than a mountain torrent, swollen by the cloudbursts of the season; nearer the Adriatic it expanded into a formidable water obstacle, across which at this time General Montgomery was engaged about Tortino.

Beyond Alfadena rose two unnamed peaks, which appeared on the map as Points 1152 and 1154. Point 1152 was at a southern bend in the road from Alfadena to Barrea, while Point 1154 rose straight from the northern outskirts of the town. Both were accessible to crossings over the Torto, the first from a point below the town and the second by a footbridge to the east, near the junction of the Torto river with the Sangro. Orders were given to "B" and "C" Companies to attack Points 1152 and 1154 through Alfadena on the night of November 22/23; Major P. S. Sandilands was to command the attack. An artillery concentration was to come down behind both peaks, on the assumption that they were as lightly held as the hills already captured. Shortly before 7 p.m. on November 27 the companies advanced down the track in darkness, high wind and lashing rain.

Entries in the War Diary give details of the Battalion's first reverse in this operation. At 3 a.m. on November 24 a report was received from "B" Company that it had been forced to disperse completely on Point 1152 and had withdrawn. No news was received from "C" Company until after first light, but "A" and "D" Companies in their rearward positions reported sounds of considerable mortar fire from the direction of Point 1154. At about 7 a.m. a Fusilier runner from "C" Company reported to Battalion Headquarters that the Company had managed to establish itself on a terrace halfway up the slopes of Point 1154 and was holding on under heavy fire from mortars, machine guns and hand grenades. A strong counterattack just before dawn, however, had forced Captain MacMichael to withdraw as his ammunition was running short, and he had taken "C" Company back to Alfadena having suffered several casualties. Both companies reported the River Torto to be in spate waist-deep and impassable for mules. Colonel MacInnes went up to Point I 168 and located the enemy positions.

An account of the two-Company attack given by Major Sandilands, who directed it, begins with his instructions to set up headquarters in the hospital at Alfadena, a deserted collection of crumbling buildings. He was personally accompanied by a section of sappers, under Corporal Squires of the Royal Engineers, to deal with the mines, which were liberally sewn on and about the approach track. Some confusion was caused by the defection of the Italian muleteers, who disliked the shelling.

"My plan", the account continues, "was to go down the track with 'C' Company leading, followed by 'B'. All bridges over the river were down, but I knew of a footbridge which was only partially destroyed. I ordered 'B' Company to seize Point 1152, going across the river just west of Alfadena. 'C' Company was to seize Point 1154, crossing by footbridge. The companies diverged short of Alfadena, 'B' Company having fortunately picked up two South Africans,

escaped prisoners of war, who guided them over the river by the way they themselves had come. The Company saw a man on the enemy side of the river and shot him. Unfortunately, he was an Indian and another escaped prisoner of war. The shot probably alerted the enemy, who were ready for 'B' Company when they reached the hill. 'C' Company also had a hot reception and a tremendous amount of ammunition was fired by both sides. I was at the foot of Point 1154. As it was not possible on account of the dark and the very steep country to return to headquarters in the hospital in Alfadena, I decided to wait for daylight. All wireless had broken down as everything got wet during the river crossing. It was a miserable night.

"At dawn I withdrew 'C' Company to Alfadena but left them in the town, as it would hardly have been wise to withdraw them up the perilous track in daylight. I sent my runner, Fusilier Pennycook, back with a note to the Commanding Officer. Later I went up the track myself, feeling very naked and exposed to view. Halfway up I met some of 'B' Company with Lieutenant Cairns, Union Defence Force, in the act of withdrawing. The enemy saw us and gave us a nasty time with machine guns and 88-millimetres. Father Bluett pluckily ventured down the track to take some stretcher-bearers to deal with the 'C' Company casualties, for which he was awarded the Military Cross.

"All this time, I was very worried about Battalion Headquarters and the rest of the Battalion who, in the original plan, were due to go in motor transport by road into Alfadena. I was relieved to meet the Colonel at the top of the track. He told me he had realised that the attack had failed and had cancelled the arrangement."

Major MacMichael, who commanded "C" Company during the attack, has given this account of his experiences:

"We were sent forward at night, after an unavoidably sketchy reconnaissance, and were ordered to attack a mountain beyond the river. We had probably three miles to march to reach the river and arrived in Alfadena, which was mostly rubble, in pitch darkness. There was no way along the river bank. The houses all ran down to the water and we had to clamber down one lane after another to find some passage over the river, which was in spate and, in the dark, sounded pretty alarming. Eventually we found the remains of the footbridge which, rather suspiciously, was only half-demolished. I was about to step on to the thing when I was shoved aside by Lieutenant Langley who said: 'I'll look after this.' Nothing exploded and we got across, immersed no deeper than our waists.

"The Company then felt its way forward to the long trudge up the mountain. 'B' Company by this time seemed to be attracting a lot of machine gun fire well over to our left on their particular mountain. This depressed us, as those features were supposed not to be defended. Subsequently, it transpired that we were actually on the bastions of the Winter Line. Anyway, we pushed on, having to cut through successive lines of wire—which didn't make us any happier.

"The first real unpleasantness started, however, when some of the enemy higher up began to throw grenades at us. Langley, leading his platoon, scrambled on and dealt with this and found what appeared to be an outpost on a spur below the main feature. It was then black as ink and I decided to sit tight on the spur till we got some moon and could see what we were about. So there we settled—and, three times, the enemy came along and tried to push us off.

"After that the moon began to show, later than I had expected, and the dawn wasn't far away. I sent Lieutenant Strathearn and his platoon round a flank to go for the main enemy position and then I wished I hadn't! It seemed as if the whole German army opened up on us and it was

obvious we'd better go down. Fortunately Lieutenant Strathearn had reached the same conclusion and returned. We departed hastily down the hill and re-crossed the river. By then it was broad daylight, the Germans had us in full view, were roused and were peppering the retreat with all they had. We brought back all our wounded, about 14, and reckoned we were lucky.

"Lieutenant Langley was the last man out. He had a personal battle with a German officer who appeared on our spur just after we had left it and started slinging grenades at him. Langley, who was carrying two Brens, had to drop one in order to fire the other. The moment he did this, the German bobbed down. When he picked up the second Bren, up popped the German again. This happened three times until we got out of range.

"We installed ourselves in Alfadena, reckoning that we needn't walk any further if the Battalion was coming up to have a go. We sat there all day and were ultimately ordered back that night. But before we retired and, in order to establish whether our attack had coaxed the Germans off the mountain, I was told to send a reconnaissance patrol back into the heights. I asked Lieutenant Biden, another Union Defence Officer and a platoon commander of 'C' Company, to undertake this. Rather curiously, he asked to be allowed to do it alone and by daylight, in preference to waiting for dark. He was quite insistent and I agreed. He went off across the river and we watched him climb steadily close to the top where he was seen and shot at. Satisfied, he came back and reported."

The situation was clarified during the day of November 24. "A" and "D" Companies remained on the terraced heights east of the valley, supported by machine guns and mortars, overlooking the vast amphitheatre of the Alfadena valley surrounded by forest and crags, with a background of high peaks tipped with snow. From these heights they could see the other companies filing across the winding track far below them. It was decided as the result of a conference on Point I 168 between the Brigadier and the Commanding Officer that (according to the War Diary) "It was impossible to hold Points 1152 and 1 154 and supply troops across the river" but "the area northwest of Alfadena was to be commanded by constant patrolling ". The two companies, "B" and "C ", which had been repulsed on the mountains during the night, were sent back to Montenero to be rested and, more important, to get dry.

On the night of November 24/25 a platoon from "C" Company returned to Point it ~ and reported an absence of enemy; but a fighting patrol of "A" Company in the same area at first light on November 25 was heavily engaged. This patrol, led by Lieutenant Grant, was overwhelmed, and only eight men came back. Lieutenant Grant and ten men did not return. A German deserter captured by a patrol of the 2nd Seaforth on November 29 was able to account for them. Seven were in a prison camp, two in a German hospital and two believed killed. "A" Company on the same night patrolled Point t 152, but met no opposition.

Patrols were out all day in the soaking rain on November 25. At 7.30 in the morning "B" Company despatched a fighting patrol along the course of the Torto. Another fighting patrol, commanded by Lieutenant W. A. J. Devine, went out to Barrea. Meanwhile "D" Company was making its way up Point 1152, and "A" Company was out with stretcher-bearers in the Alfadena valley but was halted by a powerful enemy group in the town itself. All the patrols, returning after midday, told of an alert defence. The fighting patrol sent to Barrea had suffered two casualties from an S-mine, but had also captured two prisoners. "D " Company ran into machine gun fire from the slopes of Mount Palazzo when some miles due west of the Battalion's forward positions, and in approximately the same area sustained one casualty and killed two Germans.

Before dark a" B" Company patrol detected four enemy posts and saw some shelters containing six Germans, one of whom it killed before withdrawing under the enemy's retaliating fire. Later that day another patrol from" D" Company was turned back by the rising waters of the Torto, which all patrols had to cross before penetrating the enemy defences.

A switch of companies brought "B" and "C", dry and rested in Montenero, into the line in place of" A" and " D during the night of November 25/26. The Alfadena track was guarded in case of surprise by sections of" B" Company; and "C" Company attempted a reconnaissance of Point 1152, but had to remain on its own side of the Torto, now swollen to impassibility after three days of torrential rain. That night, feeling its way along the Alfadena road to link up with "C" Company's patrol, a patrol of the 2nd Northamptonshires ran into mines on this unswept route and suffered four casualties. The weather cleared on the morning of November 26 and the divisional artillery engaged the enemy posts which the patrols had discovered. Some movement was observed on Point 1152, where Germans were still present, and the area received a concentration of fire lasting to minutes from a platoon of machine guns.

On the afternoon of November 26 the 2nd Seaforth arrived from Brigade reserve to replace the Fusiliers. The German shellfire was increasing in intensity, and the tracks leading off the road from Rionero to Montenero by which the relief was being undertaken were under heavy fire, causing dispersions and delays. However the relief was completed by 4 a.m. on November 27, and the Fusiliers were carried back to San Angelo in the transport which had brought the Seaforth forward. The total casualties of the Battalion in this operation were four killed, 25 wounded and 11 missing.

The German Winter Line was now more firmly defined in the mountain ranges encircling Alfadena. The Seaforth continued to patrol over the Torto, and other units over the River Sangro to the north, as the state of the water and opportunity permitted. Sorties by the 5th and the 1st Canadian Divisions took them into Scotrone, the village which from its peak of Mount Civitalta completely overlooked Alfadena, and into the range which collectively bear the name of Castel di Sangro. From Forli, to which the Scots Fusiliers had gone for a rest after a pause at San Angelo, there were occasional company visits to Point 1086 above the road from Pizzone to Alfadena, and one company was stationed in the Rionero valley. St. Andrew's Night was celebrated at Forli, with the Brigadier and others as guests of the Battalion.

Chapter X

THE GARIGLIANO—2nd Bn— 1943/44

Across the Moro— The crossing of the Garigliano—The landings—The attack on Mount Argento—Mount Natale— The Minturno Ridges

THE offensive had now eased, and General Montgomery took the opportunity to re-group his forces so as to bring stronger and fresher formations into the battle on the Adriatic. The Eighth Army had crossed the River Sangro and moved up the coastline to within striking distance of Orsogna, but the severe winter campaigning had seriously weakened the divisions of V Corps. He therefore moved XIII Corps eastward, replacing it in the Abruzzi mountains by the 78th Division, then in reserve.

The Eighth Army employed Canadians, New Zealanders and Indians in the thrust on the east, which was intended first to gain Orsogna and Ortona and then Pescara. Opposed to the Canadians in their drive from the Sangro to the Moro river on the axis of Highway 16 were the German 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, brought from Venice, the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division and two mountain Battalions, which relieved the 1st Parachute Division. Yet the Canadians advanced to the outskirts of Ortona and the Indians, by some remarkable feats of bridging, joined them there. The New Zealanders, operating to the west of the Indians, were badly mauled, and although they pressed on to within 400 yard of Orsogna, had to fall back on Castel Frentano, from which they had emerged, in the

face of heavy tank attacks. It was at this point that the New Zealanders were reinforced by the 17th Brigade of the 5th Division, brought hurriedly from Alfedena. On its arrival the 17th Brigade joined the 2nd New Zealand Division. Thus reinforced the Eighth Army launched another attack on Orsogna to the east. Patrols of the 17th Brigade passed through Poggiofiorita and beyond. In the fourth attack on Orsogna on December 23, which was supported by the massed artillery of XIII Corps and five regiments from V Corps, the 15th Brigade of the 5th Division advanced on Arrieli, north-west of Poggiofiorita and across the Ortona road. A New Zealand Brigade also attacked but failed to pierce the enemy line, and the advance was abandoned. Ortona was finally taken after furious street fighting, but Pescara remained intact. The New Zealand Division had sustained more than 1,600 casualties, all within two infantry brigades, from the date of the crossing of the Sangro.

The transfer of XIII Corps to the Adriatic began on December 7. The 2nd Cameronians relieved the Scots Fusiliers in the Alfedena hills, and from Forli the Battalion returned to San Angelo. Three days later, on December 10, the Fusiliers travelled in brigade convoy over mountain roads sometimes a foot deep in mud to their allotted area north of Lanciano, a badly damaged town which the Indian Division had previously captured. The area, which the Battalion reached on December 13 on foot after debussing at the Sangro, was on a ridge overlooking the River Moro. The position was taken over from the Northamptonshires after dark and occupied with three companies forward: "A" right, "D" left and "B" centre; while "C" Company, which had sent 35 men to the Divisional Battle School at Foggia, was in reserve. The country was undulating and covered with cultivation, mostly olive groves, fruit orchard and market gardens, with small farmhouses on the hillsides. The New Zealanders launched an unsuccessful attack towards Orsogna on the night of December 14/15, but the 2nd Northamptonshires moved forward successfully on their flank, crossing the Moro by an old Roman ford. Movement in the neighbourhood was restricted to the hours of darkness, as numerous enemy mortar pits lay among the olives and German tanks were dug in on the ridges beyond. At two hours notice the Fusiliers extended the flank of the Northamptonshires.

2nd Bn: Across the Moro

The following night, December '5' the Battalion was ordered to make a two-company attack across the river. Major Sandilands, who conducted the operation, had under his command "A" and "D" Companies strengthened by two detachments of 3-inch mortars and supported by 593 Battery, R.A. The mortars and ammunition were carried by mule train. The companies moved off at 10.45 p.m. along a spur immediately path down to the Roman ford. It was very dark until the

moon rose, and the crossing of the Moro coincided with some heavy speculative shelling by the Germans. There were seven casualties, among them Lieutenant R. S. Wilson, seriously wounded in the head, who later died; he was the son of ex Provost Wilson of Troon in Ayrshire. The objectives over the river were occupied by 1.30 a.m. on December 16, and four prisoners, identified as belonging to the 67 Panzer Grenadier Regiment, were taken in an observation post. "A" Company, on the left, ran into a machine gun post short of the main road from Guardiagrele to Arielli, but escaped mutilation. The area was heavily shelled at daybreak and the companies lay quiet all day.

The operation is described thus by Captain I. P. MacLaren of 593 Battery, who accompanied the attacking troops as forward observation officer, in a chapter of his biography, entitled *593, The Story of a Field Battery*, which was published by his unit:

"The Roman Way ran between a deep cleft in the sandstone heights above the south bank of the Moro and, on emerging, wound round an exceedingly slippery slope for 1,000 yards to the shingle bed of the ford. By 2100 hours a slight breeze had cleared the mist and the moon lit up the long ghostly column. The only sounds were the clink of the bundles of shovels slung on the mules, the slipping of boots on the bluey clay and the heavy breathing of marching men.

"As the first company crossed the river and was climbing the steep bank on the other side, and as the mule train was in the river bed, the Boche began to shell us. There was a short, sharp concentration. One mule went down and, after a moment's confusion, the muleteers went to ground but kept hold of their mules. The column re-formed and moved on. We reached a company of Northamptonshires where we rested while guides were supplied. 'D' Company then moved up to attack their objective. I, and my party, were detailed to follow with 'A' Company. When 'D' Company reached their objective, they found a German mortar observation post party, which surrendered. They told us that facing us up the road were 42 machine guns. We were sceptical but, none the less, it was not an encouraging thought. The road was about 600 yards ahead. 'A' Company moved into position on the left of 'D' Company and to the right of the flank company of the Northampton-shires. We established communications and began to dig, but at the first noise made by the shovels a fusillade of bullets whistled overhead from a machine gun in front of us. Then the Hun defensive fire was brought down upon us. A Fusilier, and Ede, the observation post 'Ack', were hit. Major Sandilands asked for all the defensive fire to be brought down in succession, and this proved satisfactory. Then he asked for the stonk 'Wellington', which covered 600 yards of the road in front. This was unfortunate as it was a Corps target and had not been shot-in, and when it arrived we spent an extremely uncomfortable 15 minutes with rounds landing all about us.... By first light, we were in trenches of sorts, extremely tired, rather uneasy because we were on a steep reverse slope and I was unable to find an observation post which would give me any field of view."

The Divisional Commander, Major-General G. C. Bucknall C.B., M.C., and the Brigadier visited the position on the morning of December 17 and observed the enemy shelling of the Moro valley which continued at intervals all day. It was bitterly cold, and in the afternoon "A" Company was withdrawn from its exposed situation, leaving "D" Company, to which hot meals and greatcoats were sent by mule. After reconnaissance in the area of Frisa for other possible crossings of the Moro, the Battalion less "A" Company moved forward to a position east of Arielli, between the 2nd Northamptonshires and the left flank of the 8th Indian Division. The valley was crossed with the aid of tapes; stores were carried on mules. Protective patrols from

“D” Company out in front suffered some casualties from S-mines of a kind that sprang into the air before explosion. A reverse slope position was occupied, in which the Battalion spent the night digging slit trenches, with “B” Company on the right and “C” Company on the left, both forward, and “D” Company in reserve. The anti-tank defence in this advanced post was to be supplied by three Sherman tanks, which managed to plough their way forward next morning, although some carriers loaded with machine guns had found the road through Poggiofiorito impassable. During the night reconnaissance patrols encountered the enemy east of the Moro in the direction of Arielli railway station, and enemy artillery and mortars were very active.

A standing patrol crossed the Orsogna road on December 18 and established a mortar observation post, while a section of Royal Engineers undertook the tricky business of clearing the mined road for the passage of tanks. At 10.30 in the morning this attracted German artillery fire, and Colonel MacInnes was struck on the chest by a spent fragment of shell, but continued with his duties. The Divisional Commander returned to warn the Commanding Officer of his intention to employ the Battalion after dark in an attack on Arielli railway station, but the order was later countermanded. Instead, “D” Company relieved the 2nd Northamptonshires beyond Poggiofiorita, and “A” Company came back into the hills as reserve. The night was raw and damp. Most of the hot meals conveyed by the mules had been spilt in transit, and cooking utensils were brought up. The enemy, as patrols discovered on the night of December 18/19, was still in position immediately west of the road. The Fusiliers’ positions were shelled on December 19, when “D” Company relieved a company of the Northamptonshires, and some casualties occurred at Battalion Headquarters. The day was employed by the carriers in towing up three 6-pounder anti-tank guns by a more negotiable route on the New Zealanders’ axis.

A house on the Orsogna road east of Arielli, from which a reconnaissance patrol from “C” Company had been repulsed by machine gun fire on December 20, was heavily bombarded by artillery later in the day when the Battalion fighting patrol, reinforced by 25 men from “A” Company, attacked the place. When 70 yards from the house, the party was overwhelmed by mortar fire, and it returned without Lieutenant Swift, a platoon commander of “A” Company, and a corporal. However on the following night a patrol found the house deserted. The 17th Brigade was relieved by the 15th Brigade on December 2nd; only “D” Company’s position was retained. The night withdrawal was made more difficult by heavy enemy mortar and shell fire on the Moro valley. The mules were late, as the Cypriot muleteers were terrified by the noise of high explosives and caused chaos in the mule train. Battalion Headquarters was hit, the telephone exchange smashed, and four casualties inflicted; two Scots Fusiliers, and two Cheshires from the 15th Brigade. At ~ a.m. on December 22 the Battalion was finally reassembled and settled in a concentration area off the road one mile south-west of Lanciano, where it remained over Christmas and the New Year. Here Captain Williamson and Lieutenant A. P. B. Roberts rejoined from hospital while Lieutenant Biden and Lieutenant Devine returned from the Divisional School. In addition, four officers (Lieutenants C. B. Boyle and J. C. A. Anderson, both Fusiliers; Lieutenant P. L. Nicholson, King’s Own Scottish Borderers; and Lieutenant J. T. B. Barnetson, Royal Scots) and 44 other ranks arrived as reinforcements. At the same time Major J. H. Duncan, M.C., was posted to the Staff College at Quetta. Snow began to fall steadily on the afternoon of December 31 and blocked the streets of Lanciano.

General Montgomery now sent a personal message to the 5th Division, regretting that it was to leave the Eighth Army. This produced much speculation in the Battalion, including a hopeful

rumour that it was bound for the United Kingdom by way of Naples. However, when the Commanding Officer issued movement orders on January 2, it was disclosed that the Naples area was in fact to be the stepping stone to a new operational front. Leaving Lanciano on January 3 the Battalion moved across Italy by way of Casal Bardino, Lucera and Ariano, and on January ~ reached Mondragone on the west coast, north of the River Volturno. From Mondragone it moved to Sorbello, in snow and bitter cold. In these conditions the Scots Fusiliers completed their coast to coast journey of 230 miles by relieving in the line a Battalion of the ,69th Brigade of the 56th Division on the night after their arrival. The 5th Division was now with the Fifth Army, which had fought its way from Salerno across the Volturno and stood on the south bank of the Garigliano.

2nd Bn: The crossing of the Garigliano

The Fifth Army, including X Corps to which the Division now belonged, had been chosen for the continuation of the drive on Rome. The Fifth Army had now acquired a truly international character. Its forces included, in addition to the original American units, British, French and Italians. During November it had been aggressively patrolling the Winter Line, and with reinforcements from the Eighth Army and other sources it opened an offensive in the Liri Valley, the direct route to Rome, on December 1. In order to move up the valley, it was first necessary to capture the surrounding heights: San Pietro, Mount Summucro, San Vittore, Mount Maggiore, and other peaks. To quote an American booklet of the period: "All of this was bitter fighting in the worst kind of weather and terrain. It taxed the endurance of every soldier, climbing, fighting, manoeuvring in the rain-swept valleys and sleet-lashed mountains. By January 15, the Fifth Army was secure along the general line of the Rapido and the Garigliano rivers sharing the spotlight with the famous Benedictine Monastery which rested on a high peak overlooking Cassino."

The plan was as follows. X Corps was to open the assault on the Winter Line by forcing the lower reaches of the Garigliano, thus opening the entrance to the Ausente valley and threatening the defences of the Liri valley from the rear. The Americans were to follow with a direct attack up the Liri Valley, while the French attempted to occupy the highlands above Cassino. When the German reserves had been drawn to the front a new formation, VI Corps, consisting of mixed divisions of British and Americans with armour, was to land south of Rome at Anzio.

X Corps had two other infantry divisions in addition to the 5th, and an armoured brigade. One division, the 46th, was to be placed on the right to guard the American flank; it was to cross the Garigliano river near San Ambrogio. The 56th Division in the centre was to attack on a nine mile front from San Ambrogio to the Gulf of Gaeta; while the 5th Division was to capture the mouth of the Garigliano. The artillery was allotted mainly in support of the 56th, whose line of advance was closely overlooked by the enemy. The 5th was to cross the river in silence, and in the event of success the 20 1st Guards Brigade of the 56th was to pass through and take the German defences in the rear.

The Garigliano flows through a floodplain two miles wide from hill to sea, crossed by many smaller streams and ditches. Swollen with seasonal rains, the river was then over 100 yards broad with banks 15 feet high at all points, which with the depth of water rendered it unfordable, while two railway bridges which crossed it had been demolished. The Appian Way and the Mandragone coast road met at the Minturno bridge, which had been blown. The Germans had

sited their defences according to their usual practice, with outposts on the plain and main defences on the heights at the entrance to the Ausente valley. Early capture of the foothills round Minturno and the higher features about Castelforte was essential to success. The objectives were a group of low coastal hills on which stood the towns of Minturno, Tufo and Triminsuoli, about three miles to the north of the river. These hills were terraced with olive orchards. Behind the sand dunes lay level arable land, well-ditched and broken by tracks between farms and villages, and some marshes. The fields were sown with mines and the hills above them heavily defended.

The 17th Brigade, on the left of the 5th Division, was to assault across the lower reaches of the river while the 13th Brigade crossed higher up in assault boats. Within the sector allotted to the 17th Brigade, the 6th Seaforth and 2nd Northamptonshires were to cross the river in canvas craft. The Scots Fusiliers, on the seaward flank, were to put out to sea in D.U.K.W.s (amphibious craft) and move round the estuary so as to land on the northern beaches, 1,000 yards below Mount Argento. With them were to go a company of the Seaforth, with the task of clearing the northern bank to help on its own Battalion, and a company of the Cheshires from 13th Brigade, which was to consolidate positions captured by the Fusiliers on the important and strongly held hill feature of Mount Argento. Royal Engineers were to accompany the assaulting troops to clear tracks through known minefields.

The seaborne landings were to take place in darkness on the night of January 17. At moonrise (3 a.m.) on January 18, assuming the landing operations went as planned, the Seaforth and the Scots Fusiliers were to change direction and join forces in a Brigade attack on Point 141, to the west of Minturno; and then to exploit north-eastwards in the direction of the Ausente valley as far as Point 156 (Mount Natale). Meanwhile the 2nd Northamptonshires were first to assist in the passage of the Sea-forth and then follow them over the river, cross the axis of the main attack in rear of the other two Battalions and press on to capture Trimensuoli, whence the Guards Brigade was to take the lead. In order to gain surprise the first phase of the operation was to be undertaken without artillery support. It was anticipated that the German horse-drawn 94th Division, which held the sector, was unlikely to counter-attack in more than company strength and that heavy-calibre shelling from the hills was likely to be the main means of enemy retaliation. This appreciation proved erroneous; until the threat at Anzio five days later drew off powerful enemy reserves, including the Hermann Goering and 29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions, which were committed piecemeal, the Germans stoutly defended every point and feature and organised a counter-attack which resulted in heavy casualties on both sides.

From January 6 until D-Day on January 17 the Scots Fusiliers at Sorbello joined in preparations for the X Corps attack and in furtherance of the cover plan. Careful measures were taken to hide the assembly of bridging equipment, rafts and assault boats; all movement of guns and stores was confined to hours of darkness; and olive groves concealed the growing dumps of ammunition and other material. Sappers reconnoitred at night along the river banks in search of possible crossing places. Directions to work only from sundown to dawn appear regularly in the Battalion orders of those 10 days. Daytime activities consisted of platoon boat drill on the River Volturno and at Capua, well behind the front; co-ordinating conferences; and studies by all ranks of the battle model. The D.U.K.W.s were brought forward on January 16 and parked on the Sorbello-Garrano road, which was closed and guarded all next day. On January 17 Colonel MacInnes held his final conferences, which were attended by the commanders of all supporting arms, "Mae West" lifebelts were issued, and the Battalion moved off in its D.U.K.W.s shortly

after ~ p.m. to embarkation points north of Mondragone, every man having been provided with free “cookies” from the Church Army canteen. At 7 p.m. the leading waves of “A” and “B” Companies entered the water and began their estimated two and a half hours’ voyage in the Gulf of Gaeta, followed 30 minutes later by H.Q., “C” and “D” Companies. The landings were to be made in three waves at two points about 200 yards apart. On the left and more northerly of the beaches a red guide light was to be set up by a platoon of” B “ Company when it landed there in the first wave at 9 p.m. A platoon of “A” Company was to place a similar guide light on the right hand beach, while another platoon was to advance inland and guard a railway bridge beyond the Appian Way. The second wave was to consist of the rest of” B” Company, landing 30 minutes later on the left beach with the task of overpowering the defences on Mount Argento, thus securing a start line for the next phase of the attack across the Appian Way. The remainder of” A” Company was to land in a second wave on the right hand beach and cut the Appian Way, linking up there with the 6th Seaforth in preparation for the Brigade assault on Minturno and Mount Natale. The third wave, timed for 10 p.m., was to consist of” C” and “D” Companies with Battalion Headquarters.

2nd Bn: The landings

The plan was ambitious and depended for success on accuracy in timing and execution. However the D.U.K.W.s failed not only to land the force on time but also to put the companies ashore on their allotted beaches. Indeed, it is recorded that one of these craft was carried so far out to sea that it encountered a British submarine. A sailor thrust his head out of the submarine’s hatch and demanded, “Who are you?” When informed, he remarked, “Never heard of you “, slammed down the hatch cover and submerged his craft. A more serious mishap was the delay in arrival of the Royal Engineers who were to deal with the minefields on the beaches, which immobilised the whole assault.

The War Diary observes: “The plan for landing the Battalion on the assault beaches completely miscarried and the unit was badly disorganised at the very outset. Several things contributed to this. The principal reason was the total absence of expert navigators in the crews of the amphibious craft. Many of the drivers went too far from the coast and were consequently unable to make use of the guiding lights set out at intervals along the shore or even to see the river mouth, which should have been the surest guide. In the case of the later serials, the gun flashes and miscellaneous lights of battle in the river area added to the difficulties. Not one of the craft carrying the assaulting companies of Royal Engineers found the correct beaches.”

“Until the bombardment opened at 2100 hours “, writes Major Sandilands, the second-in-command, “we had little idea where we were. It was apparent by this time that the third wave at any rate was lost. Then we saw Monte Argento, but there was no sign of the guiding lights that the first wave should have put down. The enemy brought down an artillery concentration in the sea between us and the beach. When it stopped the Colonel ordered us to shake out—’ D’ Company left and ‘C’ right—and to make for the beach. At least two machine guns began firing tracer from the seaward end of Monte Argento diagonally across our front. I personally blew up my ‘Mae West’ at this point. We had a remarkable escape, coming through without a single casualty. As soon as we touched shore we jumped out of the D.U.K.W.s and started inland. One D.U.K.W., containing part of the Field Ambulance, stuck on a mud bank fifty yards out to sea,

and shortly afterwards the doctor swam ashore. All the D.U.K.W.s except this one and one other, struck by bullets after the men had jumped out, got away safely.

“As soon as we moved inland men started going up on mines and we were withdrawn to the beach. It was most uncomfortable; we were penned in on the beach by mines in front and the sea behind and the machine guns on Monte Argento continued to shoot along the beach spasmodically.

“The Colonel took stock of what he had on the beach, which was: ‘C ‘and’ D ‘Companies; part at least of ‘A’ Company; 7th Cheshires (machine gun Battalion); regimental aid post; part of 141 Field Ambulance (on the mud bank); Battalion Headquarters, including Major Batey and his gunner party; and a Royal Artillery observation post officer from 78 Self-Propelled Battery.

“There was no sign of ‘A’ and ‘B’ Companies, nor the pioneers with them; nor of 42 Field Company, Royal Engineers.

“He ordered ‘D’ Company to take Monte Argento and ‘C’ Company to push inland to Via Appia.”

Major P. W. Batey, commanding ~ Battery, Royal Artillery, continues the account:

“‘C’ and ‘D’ Companies, moving forward, ran on to the mines immediately and lost men. Reconnaissance parties were sent out to find the missing companies. Then Spandaus and 88-millimetres opened up on us from Argento. This was not quite according to the book, as there should have been a platoon of ‘B’ Company sitting on that feature. . . . McGowan and Banks (two other gunner officers) in their ‘scrape’ in the sand were endeavouring to get some response from ‘set, but there wasn’t a cheep from the guns. Neither of the troop sets could get through and neither could the Battalion to Brigade set. Eventually, we established communication through a forward observation officer of 88 Self-Propelled Regiment, who could talk to his troop which was at sea in tank landing craft waiting to land, which could relay back to another troop south of the river. The Divisional Artillery was put down on Argento, which discouraged the Boche for a time. Then ‘D’ Company was sent along the beach to take the feature.

“About this time another flight of D.U.K.W.s beached. This was ‘A’ Company who should have landed several hours before and have been, by that time, commanding the coast road. Instead, they had been chugging about the high seas looking for the beach.

“Meanwhile... Captain Saunders, with ‘D’ Company, reported the attack held up by Spandaus and brought down Divisional fire on the area, and the attack was pushed on. Further targets called for by Captain Saunders were stopped by Colonel MacInnes, who believed from the machine gun fire that his remaining company, ‘B’, had landed north of Argento and was moving south. ‘D’ Company suffered heavily.

“The moon rose and we surveyed the scene, but we didn’t much care for it. In front of us was a minefield through which we could find no way, while on our left was Argento with the Boche in firm possession and sweeping the beach with Spandaus and shelling it with an unpleasant persistence. Behind us was the sea and on the right, where the Seaforth should have linked up after forcing the river crossing, was nothing but unpleasant Boche noises. There seemed to be no more promising course of action than to crouch in our holes and pray for the arrival of the Sappers.”

Captain Pettigrew, commanding ‘A’ Company, which was afloat for two hours, gives this description of its experiences:

"All was quiet when we set off from Mondragone. From the landward area occasional flares rose and some tracers flighted, but a low-lying mist made it difficult to distinguish coastal features. I placed full reliance on the American driver in his cockpit and when my watch read 2100 hours I pictured the landings of both forward platoons of 'A' and 'B' Companies; in only 30 minutes we would be there too.

"At this point, however, a succession of events called for drastic action. Our D.U.K.W., containing Company Headquarters and 8 Platoon, began to move away from the beach and it became obvious that the American serviceman had no clue as to his whereabouts. Two D.U.K.W.s hailed us out of the night from nearby, and turned out to be 7 and 9 Platoons. The Americans were lost, and as it was five minutes *after* zero hour I called to the platoon commanders to follow on in line ahead and ordered our driver to turn in to the shore. The Company had to be got ashore at once and to make for the objectives. Small arms fire began to fall on the approaching craft from an area to the left front. It was apparent that this must be coming from the Argento feature and I turned the D.U.K.W. in that direction and brought the other company D.U.K.W.s alongside.

"8 Platoon was first to land and I told Lieutenant Barnetson to get them across the beach until I could plot our position. The small arms fire had quietened, but men of the leading section of 8 Platoon blew up on a succession of mines and Lieutenant Barnetson, on going to investigate, was himself wounded. I ordered the section's Bren guns to be brought out and sent a runner to tell the remainder of 8 Platoon and the rest of the Company to remain at the water's edge, as it was plain that there was a well planned and extensive minefield on the beaches.

"A quick survey revealed that the landing was 500 yards south of the correct place so, keeping to the water's edge, I started the company quickly northwards and, more by luck than good guidance, an unmined area of the beach was located, by using which we moved inland to the dunes. By this time it was an hour after zero, and 'A' Company had not, to put it mildly, attained its original objectives.

"About 1 a.m. I was issuing orders for a move inland when a patrol (the reconnaissance patrol mentioned by Major Batey) reached the Company from Battalion Headquarters with the information that Colonel MacInnes was 'hopping mad' that 'A' Company had just arrived and were not inland, where they should have been. There was no time to explain the misfortunes of the landing or the minefields.

"'B' Company equally had troubles in the D.U.K.W.s and were far from Argento. 'D' Company had been sent to attack this feature and to assist 'B' Company but, from all accounts, and the noise of machine gun fire, the task was not proving easy. Colonel MacInnes sent orders for 'A' Company to assist in the attack on Argento by advancing inland on a wide sweep so as to come in at the north of the feature. At this stage, he had not appreciated that the entire area of tracks, undergrowth and hedges was massively mined. Months had been devoted to the preparation on this ground of a first-rate defensive position."

The loss of direction by the D.U.K.W. fleet also affected "B" Company, the leading platoon of which was beached on the wrong side of the Garigliano at 3 o'clock in the morning. Being unaware of their position they had set up the two red lights intended for the northern beaches, thus attracting the craft bearing the self-propelled guns which were to support the Battalion. This platoon, which ought to have attacked Mount Argento, was ferried across the river to the Battalion next day. The other leading platoon of "B" Company, after cruising too far north, found

its allotted beach at 2 a.m., to discover that its duty of planting a guide light had already been performed by Battalion Headquarters. The two craft carrying the remainder of "B" Company both broke down far out at sea. They were picked up by a patrol boat and the personnel returned to Mondragone, with the result that three platoons of this assault company were absent during the critical hours.

Although Colonel MacInnes was still unaware of the full extent of the disorganisation suffered by his Battalion, he had directed "D" Company along the coast against the enemy position on Mount Argento, and at the same time "A" Company was preparing to attack it from the landward side. Meanwhile "C" Company was pressing forward to the Appian Way, followed by Battalion Headquarters. As soon as the companies were set in motion, however, the extent of the minefields became apparent and casualties began to multiply. Between the dunes, where Battalion Headquarters was established, and the Appian Way a minefield several hundred yards in depth was discovered, equipped with a great variety of antipersonnel mines and bobby-traps. This minefield prevented the success of the Colonel's plan of attack. It forced "D" Company to attack along the narrow strip of mine-free fore-shore under fixed-line fire from German machine guns concealed in hollows and caves in the south-western slopes of Mount Argento, which rose steeply from the sea to a height of about 100 feet, extending in a ridge for some 400 yards inland. Three times turned back by this fire and unable to deploy because of the mines, "D" Company was compelled to dig in on the dunes below the Mount, where it was reinforced by a platoon of medium machine guns which had landed at mid- night. "C" Company was established on the right of "D" Company, patrolling to try to discover a lane through the minefield, but without success, when contact was made with "A" Company at about 1 a.m. With "A" Company was a section of the pioneer platoon, equipped with one mine detector. With this single piece of equipment, the Pioneer Officer, Lieutenant Roberts, assisted by his men, succeeded in clearing a path to a track junction which lay more than two-thirds of the distance between the beach and the Appian Way. Before dawn "A" and "C" Companies, Battalion Headquarters, and the only platoon of "B" Company which had landed in the area had passed through the minefield, keeping carefully to the narrow corridor along which the pioneers' tape was laid.

Lieutenant Roberts' action saved the situation, according to those present. Although continuously under machine gun fire from the enemy, he located and removed all the mines with his own hands, including those fitted with anti-lifting devices; the total count was 190. He seldom troubled to make use of his single mine-detector, as the mines were so thickly strewn, relying rather on providence and his own skill. Unhappily, he was killed some time later.

2nd Bn: The attack on Mount Argento

The track junction thus reached was occupied by "C" and "D" Companies, and Colonel MacInnes now directed "A" Company to attack Mount Argento from the north-east. He had already called down an artillery concentration from 593 Battery on the hill, but this had not had any appreciable result. Under cover of further artillery fire, "A" Company launched its attack from the track junction and reached the base of the Mount. Its advance was first checked by enemy mortar fire, then held up by thick wire and finally dispersed by a counterattack. With many of the company weapons jammed because of sand or damp, with all its officers lost, and reduced to half its original strength, it withdrew through "C" Company.

Details of "A" Company's attack on Argento have been described by Captain Pettigrew:

"'A' Company moved inland, Lieutenant Brown and myself with 9 Platoon leading, followed by 8 Platoon, Company Headquarters, and 7 Platoon. In an emergency of this nature, where speed is a prime factor, little time can be spent in carving a path by the use of mine detectors. In single file, avoiding all tracks where mines positively lay and watching for trip-wires the company released few mines and, for the first 100 yards, did not lose more than eight men. Then the fury broke.

"The Germans opened a heavy mortar barrage which enveloped the Company. The mortar fall, bad enough in itself, detonated the nearby mines and casualties mounted but spared the officers, except Lieutenant Barnetson, for the time being. Accordingly I sent Lieutenant Brown with 9 Platoon into the attack on Argento, with 8 Platoon on the right. Argento appeared to be firmly under enemy control and was despatching constant flights of tracers. 7 Platoon was held in a hedgerow about 400 yards from the hill in order to provide covering fire for the attack with every platoon weapon. I was with 8 Platoon.

"Casualties caused by fixed lines of fire were sustained as we drew closer to Argento. The final assault was about to be launched with the rump of the two forward platoons when the leading N.C.O. of 9 Platoon reported thick wire along a track running round the foot of the hill, the belt seeming to extend so far that it could not be readily flanked. Under murderous small-arms fire, Lieutenant Brown and several N.C.O.s began to search for possible gaps in the wire and to explore its extent, but they died heroically in the vain task, some with wire-cutters in their hands. The Germans, in an admirably prepared fortress position, were fully alive to the Company's presence; and they lit the track brilliantly with parachute flares. Any attempt now to blow the wire would have meant certain death for those so engaged under directly-observed fire from Argento, only 150 yards away and towering above in contrasting light and shadow.

"If we were to close with Argento it could not be through the wire. I therefore sent two separate patrols, each of three men in charge of an N.C.O., to discover if the field of wire extended round the rear of the hill. These patrols did not return and I discovered later that they had run into strong enemy outpost positions and were either killed or taken prisoner.

"No good purpose could be served in keeping the platoons exposed to the withering fire, so I decided to withdraw the remnants behind 7 Platoon in its hedgerow and to concentrate for a further attack later, supported by artillery or mortars and behind a screen of smoke. The regrouping under fire, which followed, was difficult in the semi-darkness. Lieutenant Brown had been killed, together with two-thirds of 9 Platoon, while 8 Platoon suffered heavy casualties.

"At this moment a powerful enemy fighting patrol appeared from a flank and overran the region held by 8 Platoon, and a fight ensued in which Company Headquarters joined. I was wounded and my second-in-command, Captain Doull, struck by an enemy grenade; he died later in hospital in Naples. 'C' Company, into which we were driven back, eventually beat off the attack. Company Headquarters lost several men, including Company Sergeant-Major W. Smith and the signaller, who were taken prisoner. What remained of 'A' Company was now commanded by Lieutenant Cran, the only officer left, who was killed later by an S-mine while taking a short cut. Thus 'A' Company lost all its officers."

The enemy force which had repulsed "A" Company from Argento now followed up its success with a counter-attack and "C" Company found itself in an awkward situation, which was restored principally by the resourcefulness of one of its noncommissioned officers who brought a

Piat into action. The first bomb killed two Germans, and the rest of the force moved back towards Argento. The operation had now lasted for over 12 hours, beginning with confusion at sea and ending with a heavy German counter-attack; and although it was still dark, the river, fields and heights would soon be revealed in the early light. So far the Battalion had suffered 140 casualties, including seven officers. "The attack by the Scots Fusiliers and Seaforth across the minefields of the Garigliano", observes Major Batey, "will always remain a glorious, if costly, page in their history. So many men, however, had been lost that the 17th Brigade were hard put to it to hold the triangle between river, road and sea."

The Brigade Commander came forward to the cross-tracks, and ordered a defensive position to be prepared and held at all costs. The cross-tracks were short of the Appian Way, but about 1,000 yards both from the beach and from the north bank of the Garigliano. In daylight the position would afford no cover and was directly threatened from Argento and the surrounding heights. The remnants of "A" and "C" Companies hurriedly made their dispositions, together with the two platoons of "B" Company now available, on the south side of the track junction, while "D" Company remained at the waterside still under observation from Monte Argento.

The remainder of the 17th Brigade was no better situated. Daylight found the 6th Seaforth and 2nd Northamptonshires across the river in a shallow bridgehead astride the Appian Way, on the right of the Scots Fusiliers but some distance to the rear. The Brigade was over the Garigliano, and for the moment at least in control of the crossing. At 10 a.m., however, the Germans launched the first of their organised counter-attacks with tanks down the Appian Way, and the Seaforth were in danger of being thrown back to the river until the intervention of five field regiments of British artillery restored the situation. The determined defence of the German 94th Division, pending the arrival of reinforcements for a full scale counter-offensive, continued throughout the next few days. The 13th and 15th Brigades of the 5th Division were involved in hand-to-hand fighting, attack and counter-attack, in Tufo and on the Minturno ridges. While the weakened 17th Brigade cleared the coastal minefields, X Corps was about to commit its last reserve, the 201st Guards Brigade, to maintain the seaward drive among the Minturno features. In spite of everything this sector remained the most promising, since neither of the other two divisions of X Corps, 46th nor 56th, had made much headway against the Germans, whose swiftly summoned reinforcements included detachments of the Hermann Goering Division.

The situation in which the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers found themselves at daybreak on January 18 is described by Major Sandilands, the Second-in-Command:

"The enemy still held Argento, which was only 700 or 800 yards away, and we expected a really bad day. I discussed this with Batey and this certainly was his opinion. The countryside was low sand dune from the beach up to the Appian Way, with some cultivation, and there were mines all over the place. Argento was a very steep, rocky-sided ridge rising abruptly from the plain.... At dawn the Colonel withdrew 'D' Company southwards along the beach where they were not so exposed to fire from Argento, and the rest of the Battalion dug in where they were, at the cross-tracks. Luckily the sand was soft and there was some early morning mist.

"Contrary to expectations January 18 was for us a fairly quiet day. We lay low and shot up any enemy movement we saw. One gunner officer of 78 Self-Propelled Battery did some fine shooting on to Argento, putting his shells actually into a number of the caves. The particular equipments with which 78 S.P. Battery were armed were extraordinarily accurate for pin-point targets. The Navy (H.M.S. *Penelope*, I think) lying a mile or so off shore, also shelled Argento

with good effect, and the Royal Air Force did a spectacular strike on to the Minturno ridge in support of the 15th Brigade, who were attacking.

“During the afternoon the Brigadier came up again and ordered the Fusiliers to capture Argento by next morning’ at all costs’. This attack was to be supported by the entire artillery available. During the night, however, a fighting patrol of ‘B’ Company under Captain A. T. Cairns got on to Argento, finding the enemy gone but the place still badly mined. This was one of the many valuable patrols carried out by Captain Cairns during his stay with the Battalion. He was a south African Scot, who had joined us in Sicily with two other South Africans, Biden and Moultrie. Biden belonged to Prince Alfred’s Guard, our affiliated South African regiment. These three were the ‘old guard’ of South Africans, who did yeoman service with the Regiment in the 2nd Bn. Others came and went, some being killed or wounded and some falling by the wayside from sickness or other reasons.

“At 1 a.m. on January 19 Captain Cairns fired the prearranged Verey light signal, indicating that Argento was clear of the enemy. To say that we, who had been anxiously watching for the signal since the patrol went out two and a half hours before, were relieved, is an understatement. We knew that the alternative was to capture it by direct attack the following morning—’ at all costs ‘—and, plainly, the costs could have been heavy if the enemy had chosen to hold on. The Colonel immediately sent ‘D’ Company with an Artillery forward observation officer and a platoon of the 7th Cheshires to occupy Argento, and ‘B’ Company to a position between Argento and the Appian Way. In this simple operation five casualties were suffered from mines. Many enemy weapons were found abandoned on and about Argento, the chief of which was a 7.5..centimetre self-propelled gun. Another, and very useful, find was a chart giving the exact location of all the German minefields in the locality.

“Dawn on January 19 found us a much happier Battalion. Twenty-four hours earlier none of us had a notably optimistic outlook and expected the forthcoming day to be unpleasant. Now it was different, with Argento in our hands. The first thing to be done was to send the Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Sharp, to Brigade Headquarters to cancel the artillery programme for the saturation of the Mount. The day passed in reorganisation and in strengthening our hold on Argento and the surrounding territory. ‘A’ Company, by now having no officers and being reduced to little more than a platoon in strength, was combined with ‘C’ Company. Two 3-inch mortars and two 6-pounder anti-tank guns were ferried over the river and brought up the track. One other 6-pounder and its towing carrier were blown up by a mine on the same track between the Garigliano and the cross tracks where the Battalion had lain, although it had been swept by the Royal Engineers with mine detectors. There was constant trouble with mines and several vehicles were blown up on the track during the next two or three days. It was eventually established that the Germans had buried a number of their mines too deeply to be recorded by a mine detector, and on top of each had placed a ratchet, which could be set to allow a specified number of vehicles to pass over before the last would explode the mine. The pioneer platoon worked for several hours on the dangerous task of clearing mines from the track forward of the cross-tracks to ‘B’ and ‘D’ Companies. I remember not only Lieutenant Roberts, but Sergeant Guthrie and Fusilier Simpson, giving distinguished service in dealing with the treacherous booby-traps.... Patrols were sent out on the night of January 19/20 but failed to make contact with the enemy.

The Scots Fusiliers remained on Mount Argento and in its neighbourhood for several days. It was January 23 before an attack on the enemy position on Mount Natale was attempted. Extensive patrolling round Argento failed to discover the presence of enemy in the immediate vicinity, although aerial activity over Minturno showed that there was still trouble about the Garigliano. The Fusiliers were now more warmly clad, and grateful for it, as the weather was cold. On leaving Sorbello the Battalion had been wearing the usual battle order of denim trousers and open-necked shirts with cardigans, gas capes and a small pack carried on the back. Supplies were being hurried to the forward troops across a Bailey bridge spanning the Gangliano and the gap in the Appian Way, and greatcoats and blankets reached the infantry by this route, as well as supplies of ammunition. The tracks leading to Argento were still dangerous and so many carriers were being lost by mines that they were closed to traffic and portage adopted.

2nd Bn: Mount Natale

On January 21 the Brigade Commander twice visited the Battalion to discuss plans for further operations. The Divisional Commander, Major-General Bucknall, also came to the area, bringing with him his successor, Major-General P. Gregson Ellis. On the following day, January 22, by which time the Germans had launched a counter-offensive in the hills to the east, Colonel MacInnes went twice to Brigade Headquarters and brought back news that the 17th Brigade was at short notice to reinforce the 13th and 15th Brigades; but this proved unnecessary. Next morning the Fusiliers were relieved at Argento by a reconnaissance unit of the King's Royal Rifle Corps in order to join the 6th Seaforth in an attack on Mount Natale. Colonel MacInnes went off at dawn, followed later by his Order Group, to a pre-arranged rendezvous near Minturno, while the Battalion marched to a concentration area south of the Minturno ridge, arriving at 8.30 a.m. and spending the rest of the day in preparation. The Brigadier and the Commanding Officer set out on a morning reconnaissance, and on return issued a warning order for an attack next day, January 24. The plan was changed, however, and shortly after mid-day fresh orders were issued for an attack at 4 o'clock that afternoon. The outline plan was for an advance on Mount Natale by the Scots Fusiliers, and by the Seaforth on Point 141, a height to the north-east of Mount Natale and south of the more imposing Mount Brachi. The Northamptonshires were to be in reserve. "There was no reconnaissance possible", writes the Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Sharp, "because of the height of the forward position. The advance was planned by map." The Battalion was thus moving at short notice, late in the winter afternoon, into difficult country where they had no detailed knowledge of the enemy's dispositions.

Three towns figured in the original plan of attack for 17th Brigade: Trimensuoli, Minturno and Tufo. Trimensuoli lay nearest to the coast; the other two, in the order given, further inland and to the east. All three stood on high ground, Minturno and Tufo on definite spurs of the Aurincian mountains to the south-west of Mount Natale and Point 141 respectively, rising out of winding valleys and approached from the Appian Way by indifferent roads. On January 19 the 15th Brigade, after passing through the 13th, had pressed on to capture Tufo and Minturno, and on the following day, January 20, was on the crest of Mount Natale. The first German reinforcements from the 29th Panzer Division entered the battle on January 21. On the right of this counter-offensive the British line bent, but held; on the left, Mount Natale was in enemy hands by noon on January 22, and some smaller hills north of Minturno and Tufo were captured by the Germans

at the same time. On that date the 17th Brigade had stood ready to reinforce, but was not required, as the two other brigades managed to regain the lower hills and a position at the base of Mount Natale. That was their situation on the afternoon of January 23 when the 17th Brigade moved forward from the beaches.

In describing the operation which ensued, a War Office publication, *The Campaign in Italy*, states: "The enemy counterattacked in strength, pinned to the ground the right-hand Battalion of the Seaforth and, on the left, so disorganised the Royal Scots Fusiliers that they had to be withdrawn." The disorganisation in the Scots Fusiliers was caused by the fading of daylight in a valley filled with smoke and marsh mist, rather than by enemy action. Two of the three attacking companies lost direction and never reached Mount Natale, but strayed into the lines of the Guards Brigade near Tnimensuoli. The third company, thus faced with a Battalion task, climbed alone to the crest of the Mount and engaged an entrenched and superior force, retiring only when its ammunition was expended.

Half an hour before the attack was launched a hurried reconnaissance was made to the north of Minturno, followed by a co-ordinating conference. Only a limited survey of the approaches was possible, since the enemy dominated the ground, and when forward movement began only the Commanding Officer and his Order Group had had an opportunity to see the objective or the ground over which the Battalion had to move. The Colonel being ahead on reconnaissance, Major Sandilands led the Battalion forward at 2.30 p.m. from its assembly area south of Minturno. The Fusiliers marched up a steep road into the town, which stood on a ridge crowned by a castle, and passed through narrow streets of old houses. Minturno was being shelled vigorously by the Germans, and the leading platoon narrowly escaped a heavy fall of debris; but the whole Battalion eventually emerged without mishap, and dropped down to the Minturno-Tufo road, which it crossed before swinging abruptly north-west along the valley to its start line near a white house not far from the Tufo road. From the time it crossed the Tufo road at about 3.15 p.m. the Battalion was under fire from the German artillery. The approach march had evidently been observed, and continuous shell fire searched out the companies as they made their way through the rock and scrub beside the Mount Brachi road, which passed to the east side of Mount Natale. The fall of shell grew thicker on the start line, which appeared to be a pre-selected target on which the enemy artillery had ranged for defensive fire. The shelling claimed victims, and among the wounded were Major Batey and some of his observation post party, who nevertheless carried on. The light was failing as the Scots Fusiliers approached Mount Natale. The going was rough, becoming worse as the objective was neared and presenting problems in holding the troops together. In a valley to the west of the Mount, Colonel MacInnes developed his plan of attack. At a point between a shepherd's hut and a track leading to the frontal slope of the mountain, he swung the two leading companies, "B" and "D", into a re-entrant on the left so as to bring in the assault from the western face. From that moment they were out of the battle, astray over the broken courses of the valley in bad light, smoke and mist. Failing to pick out their objective among the ridges, they described a semi-circle and after a long time made contact with the flanks of the 201st Guards Brigade on the Trimensuoli heights.

Captain Milne, second-in-command of "B" Company, recalls the uncertain frame of mind in which his company went forward in the half light and haze, and tells of running back to consult the Commanding Officer, "who was waving his stick violently in a forward direction, making it quite clear that the Company should move on."

“It was finally decided “, writes Milne, “so far as ‘B’ Company was concerned, to proceed up the rising ground to the left.... We carried on up the hill, well spread out. About halfway up it was clear we were on the wrong hill. We saw troops on the top. They were, in fact, the Guards. We hoped earnestly that they would recognise that we were British troops.

... The Guards did not open fire but accepted the position— with considerable reserve.... Darkness had fallen and wireless contact with the Battalion, which had been lost, was restored. We received an order to withdraw to a rendezvous south-west of Minturno, from which we had started off earlier in the day.”

The Scots Fusiliers, with two companies astray, were now in a position of grave danger. The Seaforth’s attack was going in on their right at Point 141, and a barrage was coming down. Three Sherman tanks came up the Mount Brachi road and passed out of sight on their way to give mobile artillery support to the attack; but they were totally destroyed either by shell fire or by mortar concentrations from Mount Natale which were bursting on all sides. Time was fast running out. Colonel MacInnes was discussing the situation with Major MacMichael, commanding” C” Company, which was in reserve, when the two officers were engulfed in renewed mortar salvos from Mount Natale. MacInnes was struck on the head by a splinter. He was carried to a hut on the hillside, where he died without regaining consciousness. MacMichael assumed temporary command, and decided to carry out the attack with his own company, although it was below strength. Accompanied by Major Batey, of 593 Battery, he swung his small force right-handed towards the track and made straight for the objective. He describes his own impressions of the attack on Mount Natale

as follows:

“I took a short walk up the nearest bit of hill to find out what was happening. Lots of people shot at me, so it looked as if I had picked the objective for my reconnaissance, and I came down hastily to collect some able-bodied Fusiliers to help me.

“I sent my leading platoon under Corporal Fisher up the hill and followed them with the rest of the Company. They were almost at once heavily pinned down by fire and Fisher, a very brave little Cockney who finished up with two Military Medals, came crawling back down to tell me what was what. He had been shot through the mouth, but managed to crawl back to Minturno unaided and made a splendid recovery.

“As it was obvious that we wouldn’t get up the hill that way, I left that platoon under Lieutenant Nicholson, my only platoon commander, and Batey, with all the Company’s mortars, to put all the fire they could onto the objective while I took the other two platoons round to attack from another angle. Nicholson was knocked out and Batey took over and carried on fighting that platoon with great enthusiasm.

“Off we went and I don’t remember anything much that did get into our way before we were on top. It was while prowling around some buildings there that I was knocked violently on to my back by something exploding on my tin hat, which tore my scalp in several directions. However, I found I was still functioning.

“It was dark by this time and I set about collecting the Company and organising some defence against the counterattacks which seemed due to descend on us. I’d an uneasy feeling that we’d got away with it rather too quietly at that stage. I realised that we’d very few men and that they had almost no ammunition left. So I decided we’d better get out of

it. We went down and back into Minturno, where I reported to the Brigadier and then left what remained of the company with Company Sergeant-Major Carr.”

The diary of “R” (593) Battery contains the following comments on the attack:

“The occupying Germans had an English speaker amongst them whose sole contribution to the battle seemed to be to shout rude remarks, chiefly accusations of cowardice and invitations to fight, which are often fairly safe requests for a defender to make to an attacker. However, the invitation was answered by a husky Fusilier who, slinging his tommy-gun, was last seen disappearing into a German slit trench, armed solely with a jack-knife.

“Throughout, the spirit of the Scots Fusiliers was indomitable and although they failed to take their objective, they gave the Germans a very worrying couple of hours.... For his services on Point 156 (Mount Natale) Major Batey was awarded a bar to his Military Cross.”

Major Sandilands, at Battalion Headquarters, was informed by the Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Sharp, that Colonel MacInnes had been killed. He passed the stretcher-bearers carrying the Commanding Officer down as he made his way up the face of Mount Natale.

“I found MacMichael at the head of ‘C’ Company “, he writes, “just below the crest of the mountain and sheltered by a terrace in the vineyards. With a few men we tried to rush the top, but were beaten back by machine gun fire at very short range. Then MacMichael and I separated. It was very hazy by now and difficult to see and the situation was confused. I think MacMichael went to the right to try to find a way round while I went to the left on a similar mission. Soon after this I was wounded and took no further active part.

“An officer was sent back to collect and rally the Battalion near the start line and, the wireless having failed, the Intelligence Officer went back to report to the Brigadier while Major Batey’s signaller managed to get through to the guns and fire was brought down on Mount Natale as we withdrew.

By midnight the Battalion was back in the concentration area south of Minturno.

“The total casualties were 53 mostly in ‘C’ Company and Battalion Headquarters.”

The decision to retire was taken at 7 p.m. “By that time “, states the War Diary, “the Brigade Commander was on his way forward with the Intelligence Officer, his intention being to hold a position, if possible, astride the road between Minturno and Point 156 (Mount Natale). Just north of Minturno, he met Major MacMichael with only a handful of his company, which he had ordered to withdraw independently by platoons. On receiving Major MacMichael’s report of the situation, the Brigadier gave orders to establish a collecting point on the road and to withdraw the Battalion completely to the concentration area of that morning. This was done, and by midnight the Battalion was assembled in that area, all the wounded having been successfully evacuated to the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry’s regimental aid post in Minturno.”

The death of Colonel MacInnes was a tragic Loss to the Battalion. He had been in command continuously since before the expedition to Madagascar and had proved himself a most capable and resourceful leader. He was popular with all ranks, to whom his utter disregard for his own safety set a most inspiring example.

2nd Bn: The Minturno ridges

The Scots Fusiliers, who had suffered 209 casualties including 12 officers, remained among the Minturno ridges for some further days, commanded by Major Sandilands, and set about

reorganising under heavy and continual shell fire. On the night of January 25 the Battalion was back within sight of Mount Natale. This followed a visit from the Divisional Commander and the Brigadier, who had asked whether the Fusiliers were prepared to carry out a further attack and were simply told: "Yes." The King's Own Yorkshire Infantry were relieved by the Battalion in various locations west and north of the town: "B" and "D" Companies on Point 172; "C" Company roughly at the south-west corner of 172 ridge, with one company of the Scots Guards under command on Point iii; and Battalion Headquarters in a house south of Point 172. A number of suburban buildings in the small valley between Minturno and Point 172, through which the Appian Way passed, were manned as strongpoints. The German artillery remained active and the house which sheltered Battalion Headquarters had several narrow escapes from destruction; an intelligence section signaller, Fusilier Chapman, was killed, and a sentry behind a wall of sandbags at the door was wounded. Protective wire and a dummy minefield were laid by the pioneer section in front of "A" and "B" Companies' positions, in case the shelling should prove to be the prelude to a fresh enemy offensive.

For the same reason the whole area was vigorously patrolled, as a result of which it gradually became evident that the enemy was less energetic, but was still not inclined to surrender the ground north of the Garigliano. Only the southern slope of Point 172 was in British possession, and a fighting patrol was maintained on the crest at night. A cemetery on the Mount Brachi road under Mount Natale was reconnoitred by a small patrol under Captain Banes on January 27 and a listening post established on the northern slopes of Point 172 from which, lying concealed during the day of January 28 and using a wireless set, he directed several artillery shoots on enemy positions about the cemetery.

During the night of January 28 the Battalion was relieved by the York and Lancaster Regiment. It then marched to the Appian Way and was lifted in trucks back to its old billets in Sorbello. Reinforcements of 3 officers and 152 other ranks arrived on January 30, and next day a ceremonial parade was inspected by Major-General Gregson-Ellis.

During the second half of January the divisions of X Corps had been penetrating along the coast and into the Auruncian mountains. The Sujo valley and the Ausente valley, down which the German counter-offensive had been channelled, were now gradually being cleared. Positions had been established on Mount Damiano and Mount Salvatito, which look down on Castelforte, and forces were being gathered for a descent on Castelforte itself when the battle ended. The 56th Division was switched to Anzio. There it linked up once more with the 5th Division, which in the meantime had extended its front along the Garigliano to fill the gap. However, it was still necessary to engage the enemy closely, in order to assist the Allied force in the Anzio bridgehead.

The Battalion relieved the 6th Grenadier Guards on the ridge west of Trimensuoli on the night of February 1/2. "D" and "C" Companies took over the forward positions and "B" filled a counter-attack role, while "A" Company, having only two platoons, remained with the "B" Echelon transport south of the Garigliano as a reinforcement reserve. The forward companies, on small but prominent features, were supplied by porters at night as it was impossible to reach them by day.

During this spell the Battalion was under command of 201 Guards Brigade. It then reverted to its place in the 17th Brigade, was relieved on the night of February 5/6 by the 2nd Wiltshires, and went into bivouac in Brigade reserve near Tufo, in preparation for a Brigade attack on the night

of February 6/7. The Scots Fusiliers' objective was to be Mount Cern, while the 6th Seaforth and 2nd Northamptonshires were to attack Bulgarini village and the dominating Mount Brachi. However, although the Ausente valley and Mount Brachi were reconnoitred in daylight, that operation was cancelled. An enemy patrol entered the forward positions on the night of February 9/10, which indicated that the line needed strengthening, and "C" Company of the Scots Fusiliers was employed for the purpose. Fighting patrols went out and a standing patrol was established, but all reported an absence of any encounter. Next day the Battalion moved to the Minturno ridges again to replace the Green Howards, the relief taking place in pitiless rain. The Reali valley was patrolled and counter-patrolled throughout the hours of darkness. During the night of February 11 /12 a German fighting patrol attacked the positions in some strength, and captured a prisoner from "B" Company. Three nights later this patrol returned, and was caught by a patrol of "B" Company on its way back from a reconnaissance, which killed three Germans and wounded others.

While at Tufo the Battalion was temporarily commanded by Major Houchin, Second-in-Command of the 2nd Northamptonshires, as Major Sandilands' wound had not healed sufficiently and he had been evacuated to hospital. When the Scots Fusiliers were withdrawn to Casanova on February 19, Major Houchin handed over to Lieutenant-Colonel E. K. Sixsmith, O.B.E. The Battalion was sent that night to relieve the 2nd Cameronians in defensive positions on Mount Damiano, the area in which the 56th Division had fought before moving to Anzio. It moved in transport to a point on the Appian Way, thence on foot along a railway track, and so up the mountain, each man carrying greatcoat, blanket and rations for the next day, February 23. Further supplies were brought up afterwards by Mauritian porters. The 2nd Northamptonshires were holding the left of the position, and the 6th Seaforth were in reserve on Salvatito. The usual routine of active patrolling was followed and there were encounters by night among the houses in the valley below. Both sides lived in sangars, which were reciprocally shelled. One night "C" Company, after 30 minutes of artillery barrage, made an extermination raid without loss from the heights down to near Vintosa.

The Americans, from their greater resources, were now finding it possible to despatch troops to assist the reduced X Corps. Companies from the newly arrived 1st Battalion 349 Regiment, of the 88th United States Division, replaced the Fusiliers on Damiano during the early morning of March 3. The Battalion travelled in transport through Carolina and Valiano to Pozzuoli on the Tyrrhenian coast, a stage on the way to Anzio, where the 5th Division was following the 56th.

All ranks, in two relays on successive days, were allowed nine hours, including travel, to visit Naples~ Thereafter, on the night of March 8 the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers embarked in tank landing craft and sailed for Anzio. It is recorded that: "the sea was calm and the men mainly in bunks and very comfortable

Chapter XI

THE ANZIO BEACHHEAD—

2nd Bn— 1944

***The Anzio scene—"The Fortress" and "The Claws"—The break-out
—La Fossa—The fall of Rome***

THE invading force at Anzio was British and American. A new corps, the VI, had been formed, with an American commander, Major-General Lucas, consisting of the British 1st Division, with armour and commandoes, and the American 3rd Division, also with armour, a ranger Battalion and a paratroop group. The landing had taken place on the beaches of Anzio and Nettuno, 30 miles south of Rome, on January 22 1944, and the orders were to advance on the Alban Hills, which command the capital city from the south. The Allies captured the port of Anzio and the seaside resort of Nettuno and next day consolidated within a perimeter which enclosed a bridgehead seven miles deep and 15 miles wide. The British sector, roughly one third of the bridgehead, was to the north, and the American to the south, with the straight Anzio-Albano road as a dividing line running almost due north and south. The British front line followed the southern bank of the east to west course of the Moletta River from the sea to the road; the American front line continued the perimeter eastwards below the village of Padiglione, finding a natural flank on the Mussolini Canal, which was part of an engineering project for the drainage of the Pontine Marshes. Apart from the surprise landing, however, and the advance of the Allies as far north as Compoleone on the Albano Road and towards Cisterna in the east, the events at Anzio gradually took the form, not of a British-American Army exploiting towards the Italian capital, but of a furious German offensive aimed at removing what Hitler described as “the abscess south of Rome “. General Lucas stayed eight days in his original perimeter building up his forces, instead of pushing on northwards. General Kesselring reacted by bringing nine divisions from the Adriatic front and from the Garigliano front. An American Fifth Army publication, *Road to Rome*, observes: “Eleven days after the landing, despite our efforts to handicap his movements, the enemy had assembled 98,000 troops on the Anzio-Nettuno front, compared to approximately 92,000 of our own. The Germans threw everything they could at the embattled Fifth Army beachhead. Planes, day and night, strafed and bombed our lines and shore installations. Artillery and huge railway guns, ‘the Anzio Expresses’, sent shells into our positions. The shriek of Nebelwerfers added to the din of battle. Tiger tanks, with accompanying infantry, made mass attacks. Fifth Army soldiers dug in and held. By their own courage, and the skilful handling of their weapons, they literally decimated the attackers, took many prisoners and sent the remnants staggering back.”

The intense fighting in the bridgehead was over by February 19. The 5th Division, which included the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, arrived to take up positions on the perimeter on March 8. On arrival it immediately relieved the 56th Division in the British sector. The 56th, which had joined the battle in the bridgehead towards the middle of February, had been heavily reduced in numbers during the period of General Von Mackenzen’s last and almost successful throw to eliminate the Allied force. The Scots Fusiliers, themselves weakened by casualties on the Garigliano, replaced the 2/7th Queen’s Own Royal Regiment, which had been reduced to a strength of two companies in the rescue of an American Battalion west of the Albano road on the night of February 23. The 5th Division was on the coast at the extreme left of the bridgehead, and was flanked on its right by the British 1st Division.

The plain of Anzio stretches north for 20 miles to the Alban Hills. Farmlands reclaimed from the Pontine Marshes covered the flat country to the south-east of Anzio, lines of wood and pasture spread to the north-west, and miles of scrub swept inland from the beaches. In the British sector, narrow gullies cut deeply into the surface. A description of the new surroundings of the

5th Division and of life at Anzio has been written by Colonel (at that time Major) J. L. Maxwell, D.S.O., O.B.E., who was to command the Fusiliers at the later period of the breakout.

2nd Bn: *The Anzio scene*

“The features of the Divisional front “, Colonel Maxwell writes, “were the River Moletta and its ‘wadis’. The Moletta runs roughly east and west, turning and twisting in its deep channel, the banks rising steeply 30, 60 or even 100 feet above the river bed and thickly clad with bushes and trees. Into the Moletta ran innumerable tributaries from both sides, the wadis, all extensive erosions varying from a few feet to some 30 or 40 feet deep at their exits, where the front line ran to the south of the river. Only a few feet broad at the bottom, with vertical walls and eccentric turns, they could be a nightmare along which to carry supplies or equipment or, worse• still, to bring down a wounded man on a stretcher. The surface between the wadis was flattish and covered with woods, copses and small farms, scattered irregularly. In fine weather the dust rose and enveloped all movement and when it rained the wadis became flowing torrents and the bottoms became filled with mud of a particularly sticky and clinging character. Our only hope was that the Germans suffered more in the main bed of the Moletta than we did in its tributaries.

“The gun positions of the divisional artillery were only a short distance to the east of our ‘ B’ Echelon, where the administrative part of the Battalion remained and to which we betook ourselves when out of the line resting. The gun lines were the subject of considerable hostile attention by the enemy gunners; consequently, ‘B’ Echelon received a number of ‘overs’ directed at the artillery, apart from the deliberate shelling of a rest area when the Boche wanted to be annoying. In addition, the port of Anzio, on which the Germans made numerous air raids, was not very far away and we received the benefit of these performances in two ways: from bombs that were misdirected and by the falling shrapnel of our own anti-aircraft batteries, not to mention the enemy habit of showering’ butterfly’ bombs indiscriminately over the rear areas. As a result we lived in dugouts and wore steel helmets during rest periods.

“The area was officially cleared of all Italian civilians, but a number remained in the ruins of Anzio and Nettuno, and in the country there were a few shepherds still watching over their flocks. I remember one day meeting one such shepherd, an old man, with a small flock of sheep which were grazing contentedly although the place was plastered with mines. The mortality rate of sheep must have been enormous. It was a singularly waterless area, except when it rained. All water for drinking, cooking and washing had to be brought up by the ration parties in jerry cans. Consequently, we were always on the short side for water and, at one stage, we were rationed to half a gallon per man per day, but in spite of the lack of moisture the wild flowers grew abundantly and brought beauty into an uninviting prospect. The bridgehead, too, was alive with nightingales, and as soon as darkness fell, no matter what form of beastliness was stalking around, the nightingales would sing for hours.

“There were other features only too familiar to all who served in Anzio; for instance, the lateral road, along which all supplies to the Battalion in the line had to come by jeep and trailer. The gallantry of the jeep drivers is gratefully remembered, since, night after night, generally under fire, they never failed to deliver their loads. The names recur, too of Sheep Pen Farm, regarded as the last safe point on the way up, A.D.S. House, near which a German plane crashed,

shot down by the anti-aircraft batteries; and, away on the right of the divisional area, those two placid-sounding places, Crocus and Cricket.”

Within the bridgehead a daily newspaper was produced by the Americans, who were proud of the achievement of getting the news to the front line by breakfast time. The Scots Fusiliers produced an additional stencilled newssheet of their own, which provided a service of war news, feature articles, verses, and information concerning Fusiliers in hospital. The B.B.C. produced a broadcast programme from Anzio, in which a principal performer was Pipe-Major MacConnochie of the Scots Fusiliers, who had been a pupil of the famous Pipe-Major Ross in his piping school at Edinburgh Castle. MacConnochie’s most enthusiastic audiences in the bridgehead were the Amen-cans, who never missed one of his performances. They were much impressed by the Pipe-Major, and uncertain how exalted was his rank, a fact which he was not slow to turn to advantage on occasion.

Morale in the bridgehead was high, with everyone determined to make the best of the situation. The Scots Fusiliers celebrated “Mangoki Night” on May 9, the anniversary of final victory in Madagascar, with a dinner, for which the Battalion cooks, as always, rose to the occasion and excelled themselves.

2nd Bn: “The Fortress” and “The Claws”

The 56th Division, now replaced by the 5th, had been greatly reduced in two weeks of heavy fighting. The 5th undertook no major operation, but had to endure two months of position warfare in “The Fortress”, where the divisional casualty rate was 70 a week, or in “The Claws”.

The front line in the British sector to the west of the road leading to the Alban Hills was situated where the battle had died out in the previous month. Its rear was secured by the sea, and the Moletta River guarded it from flank attack; but while the perimeter of the bridgehead followed closely the south bank of the river, it was withdrawn near the outlet as it moved eastwards. Thus the Germans were on both sides of the Moletta and tactically placed to harass the British defences. “The Fortress” was the name given to a position which lay in the deep country on the divisional right flank, and the “North Claw” and “South Claw” to positions nearer the sea. The defended localities sited in these three places were peculiar in that although the short roll of the downland prevented frontal observation, yet the enemy was so close that any movement by day met with trouble. The Fortress, especially, had an evil reputation in every Battalion of the Division. The forward companies there were not more than 30 yards from the Germans. The country was covered with dense scrub, and it was possible to crawl within five yards of the opposing trenches; as a result, time spent in the area was a continuous strain on the nerves. Fire from mortars and automatic weapons were steady and effective. Not a yard of ground could be yielded in The Fortress, in case the left flank of the 1st Division was endangered. Opposing the 5th Division was the 4th German Parachute Division, with powerful artillery support.

The Battalion’s first spell in the South Claw position, which was sited in the Wadi Spinacito, proved comparatively uneventful. Three companies of the Scots Fusiliers, “B”, “C” and “D”, took over the position from the 2/7th Queens. “A” Company had not been re-formed since the Garigliano operations, for lack of reinforcements. The Fusiliers, in consequence, had been given a reserve role, and the 2nd Northamptonshires were forward. On the first day in the South Claw a Fusilier was killed, and two officers and one man wounded by shellfire. On the next day another

man was killed and three men wounded from the same cause, and two further casualties were incurred in the same way that night. Heavy rain fell on March 12, the wadis were awash, and it was intensely cold. A 17th Brigade attack on some high ground above the Moletta was prepared, but eventually postponed. However a limited attack was made by the 6th Seaforth on some fortified houses, which the enemy strongly resisted. The 15th Brigade relieved the 17th Brigade at about midnight on March 20, and the Fusiliers moved back to rest with "B" Echelon near the beach. Enemy bombing in this area on the morning of March 17 had caused two deaths, and wounded five including Major Sandilands, the Second-in-Command. As the whole beach was now under shell fire and little use could be made of the buildings occupied by "B" Echelon, all the men lived in slit trenches covered with old doors, which gave an illusion of safety. Despite the cold some Fusiliers went swimming in the Mediterranean, and a massed band of pipes and drums played in the afternoon at Battalion Headquarters, consisting of pipers of the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, 6th Seaforth Highlanders, 2nd Cameronians and 6th Gordon Highlanders, who also provided the drummers. The band marched and countermarched on the dunes a few miles from the line.

On the night of March 26/27 the Battalion returned to the line to relieve the Inniskilling Fusiliers in The Fortress, where it stayed for 10 days and suffered many casualties, including its commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Sixsmith, who was wounded. Major Batey, of "R" Battery, has given this account of the position and of his duties there:

"The situation bordered on the quaint. The Battalion had to sit in company clumps along one of the deep wadis that desolate the area. The Boche sat a little further along the same wadi and, as is his disagreeable custom, on all the high ground. The sector was said to be static but 'sticky'. The Battery Commander's party discovered the 'stickiness' as soon as it reluctantly abandoned its jeep. The rendezvous was Sheep Pen Farm, which the enemy obligingly illuminated with flares, so we waited 15 minutes while he made pretty play with mortars and an occasional Spandau. Then, giving up hope of a guide, who, we discovered later, was at that time groping about wadis with unscaleable sides, we struck across country and very soon ran into a carrying-party heading for the Battalion area.

"It was hardly a gunners' paradise. No observation was possible and all shooting had to be done by instinct or intuition from a few targets registered by the air observation post. We arrived at Battalion Headquarters, which consisted of pleasantly substantial dugouts. Communication was difficult, as the line crossed the plain, and it could be maintained only by night and was usually broken by mortar fire. The nature of the country was 'agin' wireless, and at times we had to have two relay stations in a stretch of 7,000 yards.

"Every morning the enemy attacked the forward positions and some brisk little battles were fought. The area was steadily mortared, but the protection afforded by the wadi was almost complete and there were few casualties from bombs, although the place took its name from a row of neat graves of Inniskillings that lined part of it. Taken by and large, it was quite a good spot from which to be relieved."

This tour of 10 days in the wadis of The Fortress, during which "B" and "C" Companies of the Fusiliers were in the exposed forward positions, with the 2nd Northamptonshires on the right and the 6th Seaforth in reserve, involved the Battalion in one heavy attack and a succession of minor engagements by night and day. The shelling, mortar fire and sniping rarely ceased and casualties steadily mounted. The most serious of the engagements occurred on the last day of March, in the

morning light. The enemy was seen to be forming up for attack, and was dispersed by artillery fire no fewer than five times, but still came on determinedly. Fighting began at close quarters in "B" Company's wadi. Pistols, grenades and automatic weapons were employed in the depth of the creek by both sides. Although "B" Company stoutly attempted to repel this determined attack, it was obliged to yield 150 yards of ground and lost one dead, 11 wounded and seven prisoners. A company of the Seaforth had to be brought forward from reserve to reinforce the Fusiliers.

With this exception, German attacks on the forward platoons were repulsed in all cases; this became less difficult after the approaches had been mined and trip-flares set, but as a result of the continuous fighting and regular bombardment by the German artillery and mortars, scarcely a day passed without casualties being incurred. The Fortress also produced serious problems in the evacuation of the wounded. An arrangement was made with the enemy, who were themselves in similar difficulties, whereby casualties could be brought back to safety under a Red Cross flag. When the Battalion stretcher-bearers reached the edge of the 600 yards carry across open country, they awaited the signal to pass from the Germans; a burst from a machine gun fired into the air, and then moved on. Major Batey makes these comments on this practice: "From the main observation post there was a very pretty view of the exceedingly industrious paratroops on whom the Battery (593) inflicted punishing casualties. They were curious people. They fired mortars from under Red Cross flags. After the mortars had been silenced they had the effrontery to bring out their stretcher-bearers to collect casualties under yet more Red Cross flags. In spite of these lapses the Geneva Cross was generally respected. The Boche was inclined to sail rather close to the wind in these exchanges and take the opportunity to stand up and survey our positions. On one occasion a German officer actually walked into a forward platoon position under a Red Cross flag and asked leave to collect his casualties. This was granted; but when he was told politely that, having seen our dispositions and furthermore, being armed, he could not return, he grew livid with rage."

Field cable communications in the area were frequently severed. The Battalion War Diary, after recording the loss of the Signal Officer and his assistant, goes on to commend the heroism of the Signal Section in its devoted efforts at repair. While paying high tribute to all the signallers, the Diary mentions particularly 3127966 Sergeant J. Finnie "for day and night maintenance of the lines in exceptionally difficult circumstances"

On the night of April 3/4, when the Battalion was about to be relieved by the 2nd Wiltshires of the 53rd Brigade, Colonel Sixsmith and his Adjutant, Major Macfarlan, were wounded while waiting outside the command post in the wadi; and Father P. Bluett and Captain G. E. Banes were among the casualties in the South Claw position. A field return of the Battalion strength late in March 1944 shows that of the 37 names in the officers' list only 23 were Royal Scots Fusiliers; six were from the Union Defence Force and the rest were Royal Scots, Black Watch and Gordons. The total of reinforcements required in other ranks is shown as 186; two weeks later it was 263. A new commanding officer, the third in as many months, was waiting at "B" Echelon when the Battalion reached the rest area; this was Lieutenant-Colonel P. J. S. Boyle. Captain J.A. Bowie was appointed Adjutant; Regimental Sergeant-Major Burr left to take over at the Divisional Tactical School and his place was filled by Regimental Sergeant-Major M. Rodger.

In early April rain flooded the slit trenches in the rest areas of Anzio. There was no chance to play football; the only recreation before the Fusiliers returned to the front on the night of April 12/13 was provided by a mobile cinema. For the next tour in the line the Battalion was split up.

The 2nd Northamptonshires took the dismounted anti-tank platoon of the Scots Fusiliers with them into the North Claw. The 6th Seaforth, with two platoons of "C" Company and a platoon of "D" Company of the Fusiliers, were in The Fortress. The Inniskilling Fusiliers of the 13th Brigade, in reserve south of the lateral road, were replaced by three other platoons of the Fusiliers; and the remainder of the Battalion including Headquarters remained in the "B" Echelon area. A night porter service from Sheep Pen Farm to the forward positions was resumed.

At this time news was received that Major J. H. F. Mac-Michael, M.C., had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order, and that Major A. F. Whitehead and Captains W. A. Pettigrew and A. M. L. MacFarlan the Military Cross, for gallantry during the crossing of the Garigliano in January. The issue of one mepacrine tablet per day marked the beginning of full anti-malarial precautions. Enemy shell and mortar fire continued to fall in the wadis, and more casualties occurred; two men of "C" Company were the first victims. On April 16 the Germans penetrated into The Fortress and captured three men of the Fusiliers' anti-tank platoon. "B" Company was bombarded by a Nebelwerfer on April 17, and was also showered with propaganda leaflets. On the same day several enemy attacks were launched against The Fortress companies and "C" Company lost two killed and three wounded by mortar fire. The Germans also managed to set fire to the dug-outs in 13 Platoon area by using phosphorous bombs, and the position could no longer be occupied except at night. The 6th Seaforth had to be reinforced by a platoon from "B" Company of the Scots Fusiliers, which moved into The Fortress after dark. By the time the Battalion was relieved by the 1st King's Yorkshire Light Infantry on April 19 and returned to the "B" Echelon area, one officer and 73 other ranks had arrived as reinforcements, of whom 20 already belonged to the Regiment and the rest to the King's Own Scottish Borderers. This draft was followed some days later by another of one officer and 40 other ranks, of whom 25 were from the Border Regiment. By this time Brigadier Ward had left to take command of the 4th Division and Colonel A. M. Finlaison, D.S.O., O.B.E., had taken his place in command of the 17th Brigade.

The appalling drain of casualties, still far from balanced by recent drafts of reinforcements, necessitated a further reorganisation of the Battalion. Only "B" and "fl" Companies remained as separate entities for the next spell of front line duty, which was in the North Claw with the Northamptonshires holding The Fortress, and began on April 28. Enemy shelling and mortar fire were continuous, and casualties again mounted. The Northamptonshires attacked on May 2 and infiltrated into German positions, but were thrown out by an immediate counter-attack. "B" Company of the Fusiliers, commanded by Lieutenant R. E. Willey, had two men carried off as prisoners in one of a number of minor raids, but successfully repulsed another raid by a whole platoon of the enemy. The driving of saps, improvement of trenches, digging of observation posts, laying of mines and setting of trip-flares went on every night. While moving out of the Michele wadi on May 6 to make way for the incoming Green Howards, the Battalion came under heavy mortar and machine gun fire, losing one killed and four wounded in "B" Company. Between May 7 and 9 two considerable drafts of reinforcements reached the Battalion from the Liverpool Scottish. These raised its numbers in time for the occupation for three weeks of what was known as the "Final Position", that is, the position to be held before the breakout from the bridgehead.

This Final Position, which the Division occupied on the night of May 10/11, was on the extreme left of the perimeter on the high south bank of the Moletta, and reached to the sea. The

2nd Northamptonshires held the beach area, the 6th Seaforth the centre, and the Scots Fusiliers a wood on the right of the Brigade sector. "B" Company, less one platoon, was kept back in the "B" Echelon area to train the reinforcements, who had come straight from the United Kingdom. The Quartermaster and the Ration Corporal, Corporal Robertson, had planned and produced an 8-man pack, carried in a sandbag and easily distributed, which had proved most effective in supplying the forward companies on the Garigliano. This was now adopted universally by the Fifth Army, and was subsequently passed on to the Eighth Army by VI Corps.

On May 17 the Germans opened a heavy concentration of mortar fire on Headquarter Company and on the centre and right platoons of "D" Company, during which phosphorous bombs started several fires. An enemy raid developed, but was repulsed by the British anti-aircraft gunners. Next day, in retaliation, Colonel Boyle arranged for the entire weight of the Corps artillery, including medium and heavy guns, to be concentrated on four enemy positions in front of "D" Company. The moral effect, apart from the destruction caused, kept the Germans on the coast quiet for some days.

British reconnaissance and fighting patrols were increased, both to gain accurate information and also to contain the enemy divisions facing the bridgehead in view of the impending large scale operations towards Rome. Every man had been informed on May 20, two days in advance, of this coming offensive in which the 5th Division and the 1st Division (to be withdrawn after the Tiber was reached) were to stage a diversionary operation as part of the general cover plan.

2nd Bn: The break-out

General Alexander's spring offensive was intended to destroy the right wing of the German Tenth Army and to drive what remained of it, together with the German Fourteenth Army, out of Rome and back to the Rimini-Pisa Line. "Rome," writes Eric Linklater, "was the obvious prize. Its capture would be the most spectacular achievement of the forthcoming battle, for the German's resolute defence of it through the bloody months of winter had made Rome and its possession a symbol of victory; and to the Italians. . . and to the outer world, the occupation of the capital would go far to redeem and fortify our promise to liberate the countries of Europe from their tyrannous masters"

The junction between the beleaguered forces in Anzio and the rest of the Fifth Army came with astonishing speed. On May 23 the VI Corps at Anzio, in the American sector east of the Albano road, struck at Cisterna, Con and Mount Arestino, and by nightfall on the third day had cut Highway 7 on both Q sides of Cisterna; whereupon General Von Mackenzen's five German divisions containing the bridgehead began to break. After overcoming opposition at Terracina and moving by the straight roads running through the flooded Pontine Marshes, combat engineers and a reconnaissance squadron of II Corps met troops who had emerged from Anzio near Borgo Grappa in the early morning of May 25. The days of the Anzio bridgehead were over.

During May Anzio had been reinforced with three American divisions, the last arriving at Nettuno on May 22. Two of these fresh divisions made the attack on Cisterna, while the American II Corps was hurried overland to exploit the success of the Anzio divisions. No attempt was made by General Kesselring to reinforce his troops south and west of the Alban Hills in the face of this advance, but the Hermann Goering Division was in a strong position at Valmontone

to cover the routes of withdrawal, and for three days it stood its ground and counterattacked while the Germans escaped safely towards and through Rome.

The Green Howards had withdrawn to the south bank of the Moletta on May 23, and two companies of the Scots Fusiliers were entrenched in the Final Position. The British 1st Division was holding the perimeter eastwards to the Alban road, to protect the left flank of the Allied advance towards the Tiber.

During the night of May 26 it was found that the enemy was not occupying his normal positions on the front of the 17th Brigade, and it was concluded that he had withdrawn completely to the far bank of the Moletta. "B" and "C" Companies of the Scots Fusiliers sent small parties forward to find out whether the German positions on the north side of the river were occupied during daylight and, if not, to lodge platoons there. This reconnaissance proved that the Germans were still in position, but intelligence reports from Brigade Headquarters were to the effect that their departure was imminent. To maintain contact, the Scots Fusiliers and Seaforth were ordered to patrol forward each morning at first light to attract fire and so learn of any enemy re-disposition. As soon as they were certain that the enemy had withdrawn, the two Battalions were to dig in on the north bank, while the Northamptonshires passed through in order to patrol the country to the north. Early on the morning of May 27 the Germans were still present, throwing hand grenades at the forward companies, and later using Spandaus. "B" Company of the Fusiliers was pushed forward, one platoon at a time, and reached unmolested a ridge to its front, with one casualty caused by a mine. At about the same time a fighting patrol of two platoons from "D" Company was ordered to attack a feature known as "The Horseshoe". The men lay down in front of their positions to await supporting artillery fire. Unfortunately the supporting shell fire fell short, and inflicted so many casualties that the attack had to be abandoned.

2nd Bn: La Fossa

On the morning of May 29 came reports that the enemy had retreated, and "C" Company, after probing with a patrol, advanced into The Horseshoe. "B" and "D" Companies, moving fast but cautiously, were soon able to report that they were clear of the minefields and over the Moletta, and by midday had gained the level plain beyond. Battalion Headquarters followed at once.

Before 2 p.m., however, "C" Company ran into an ambush, and its leading platoon lost one man killed and four wounded. Up to this point the broad line of advance had been towards the village of Ardea, which was later to be captured by the Wilt-shires. The Battalion had gained its first objective, which consisted of a wood and hill on the far bank of the Moletta. Shortly after the ambush, however, orders were received to work down a long spur on the left front towards the farmhouse of La Fossa, with the object of trapping the Germans as they withdrew from the north bank of the river. This fresh direction brought the Battalion, after clearing the riverside, into level fields surrounding La Fossa farm, the new objective. The Fusiliers advanced steadily in extended order across this featureless ground, "B" Company on the left with the reconstituted "C" Company a short distance behind it. For the first 500 yards the only enemy reaction was an occasional burst of Spandau fire, but half an hour after beginning the advance across the plain the Battalion encountered a well placed and cunningly concealed German rearguard force, which opened intense fire with mortars and machine guns. This was immediately followed by a heavy

artillery concentration, evidently prepared for such a target. The companies dropped into the long grass of the exposed plain and endured continuous fire from three sides. There was virtually no cover, and at that juncture no possibility of movement in any direction. The only hope of survival lay in calling down a concentration of artillery fire on the German positions. This however was prevented by a disaster of the first magnitude. Major Batey, commanding "R" (593) Battery of 156 Field Regiment, who was with the Battalion on the plain as forward observation officer, was killed by the German shell fire directed on the Fusiliers. His wireless set was destroyed at the same time, and therefore no signal could be passed to the guns. The Battalion was thus left with rifles and Bren guns only to pit against the heavy armament of the Germans; cut off and unable to communicate, it stayed to ground for three-quarters of an hour, while casualties mounted.

At approximately 4 p.m. the Germans sent about 100 men forward from their concealed positions to attack the two platoons on the right of "B" Company, which were completely overpowered and for the most part taken prisoner. Fifteen minutes later, faced with the prospect of complete destruction if the Battalion stayed longer, Colonel Boyle gave orders for retirement to the first objective. Throughout the half mile of the return journey the intensity of the enemy fire was maintained without a pause and continued to impose casualties. Colonel Boyle, having waited to see the two forward companies and the reserve company go past him, remained behind to help two wounded Fusiliers. As he walked towards the men he was shot through the head. Major J. L. Maxwell assumed command of the Battalion, which continued to suffer further casualties until some rough ground on the north bank of the Moletta was regained. A company of the Seaforth had formed a firm base through which the remnants of the Battalion passed to the rear, where they concentrated. The Scots Fusiliers had lost on that afternoon of May 29 about 140 of all ranks, killed, wounded and missing. When the Germans, who had followed up the Battalion as it fell back, later withdrew, a search was made on the plain for wounded and missing. Although some were found, the reduction in the strength of the Battalion remained at about 100. Seven officers were casualties: Colonel Boyle killed; Major J. Williamson and Lieutenant W. M. Rogerson wounded; and Lieutenants P. R. E. Willey, A. Watt, C. O. Crighton and J. Le Gallais taken prisoner. As Colonel Maxwell observes: "It was a heart-breaking finish to Anzio and, for us, of the Italian Campaign."

Colonel Boyle's death was deeply regretted by all ranks of the Battalion, which he had joined as Second-in-Command in April 1944, coming at his own request from the 1st Reconnaissance Regiment, with which he had landed at Anzio. He proved himself an able Battalion commander whose confidence and leadership were an inspiration to everyone. The Divisional Commander, Major-General Gregson-Ellis, wrote of him: "When he was killed, he was nearer to the enemy than any other man in his Battalion. He was full of ideas and enthusiasm. He obviously knew his job and inspired great confidence thereby. A good soldier and a great gentleman."

"The Battalion spent the night of May 30", writes Colonel Maxwell, "on the south bank of the Moletta in Brigade reserve. We were so weak from the debacle as now to have again only two rifle companies, 'B' and 'D', but Major Sandilands rejoined from hospital and again became Second-in-Command."

"On May 31 we moved forward to the area of La Fossa, where we remained in reserve, the 2nd Northamptonshire being forward on the right and the 6th Seaforth in front of us. That same night the enemy made a bold attack on the left-hand Seaforth Company and scooped up

practically the whole lot. A few Seaforth escaped and got back through 'D' Company's position. We 'stood to' for the rest of the night, but nothing further happened.

"Incidentally, in La Fossa farm "D" Company eventually found an old bronze bell, which once might have been a church bell. This was 'liberated' and carried along by the Battalion. It served as a Regiment Quarter Guard bell for the next two or three years and was then presented to the Regimental Museum, where it now is.

"The next three days were spent around La Fossa. The enemy was holding on firmly, regardless of what was happening further east. In front of us he held a small village, Campo Jemini, standing on a low ridge on the far side of the stream Rio Turto, a strong position. We made no attack, confining ourselves to patrolling and harassing him by fire, while on our right the other two brigades of the Division were trying to push forward but without much success. One day we had a grandstand view of an attack north of Ardea by the 1st Wiltshires. A Battalion going into attack was a spectacle one rarely had a chance of observing in comfort and security.

2nd Bn: The fall of Rome

"Finally, on the night of June 4/5 the enemy went, and on the 4th we moved forward and occupied Campo Jemini where, about 10 a.m., we heard that the Americans had entered Rome. Here we remained until we went on to Castel Porziano, west of Rome, on June 6. We bivouacked in a great oak forest, part of some Italian nobleman's estate, and rested for five days before moving back to Capua en route for the Middle East.

"During the period a large number of men visited Rome and our pipes and drums, combined with others, played in St. Peter's Square to the great delight of the Romans. Our padre, Father P. Bluett, M.C., had the privilege of celebrating Mass in St. Peter's through the friendly offices of a fellow Irishman, a priest living in the Vatican."

Lieutenant-Colonel Maxwell commanded the Battalion for the remainder of its war service. He was its fourth officially designated commanding officer since it left the United Kingdom for Madagascar, two of his predecessors having been killed and the other wounded in action. Major F. W. Batey of "R" Battery, whose devoted services to the Battalion have been described in previous pages, was one of many killed at La Fossa. "By some he was considered reckless," wrote one of his officers, Captain M. K. F. Cocks. "Perhaps he was; but he set such a high standard for himself that he would permit nothing and no one to divert him from his object, which was to put himself, regardless of danger, in the very best position where he could destroy the enemy and help his own infantry, whose faith and confidence he had so justly won."

Of the divisions of X Corps which had formed the original battle order on the Garigliano, the 46th and 56th had left Italy for the Middle East for rest and reconditioning. Both these divisions were to return later in 1944 as formations of V Corps, to take part in the attack to the north of Rome on the Gothic Line. The third one, the 5th, was now to follow the others to the Middle East. Its move from Castel Porziano, 15 miles south of Rome, to the Naples area was accelerated for tactical reasons. These reasons were explained to all troops in the Division by its Commander, Major General P. G. S. Gregson Ellis, in a Special Order of the Day, dated June 9, which read:

"By continuous fighting since the invasion of Sicily began, you have contributed more to the capture of Rome than any other Division in the Allied Forces. The opportunity for spectacular results has seldom come your way, and you have had little publicity; but you may justifiably feel

proud of the skill, courage, endurance, discipline and cheerfulness which have accomplished so much. A very well-earned respite from battle is now at hand.

“We all remember with pride the comrades whom we have lost and we grieve for their sorrowing families. Events have shown that they did not die or suffer in vain.

“There have been many rumours that the Division was going home and that, of course, is what most of us desire beyond all else; there is no chance of this in the immediate future. I have a further, though lesser, disappointment for you; the embargo on visiting Rome will continue until at any rate a large part of the Division has moved back to the rear area. The Army Commander has rightly decided that he cannot allow large numbers of visitors to Rome for a few days until the forward moves of divisions pursuing the retreating enemy have been completed and until the arrangements for controlling the civilian population and overcoming the food shortage are effective.

“Furthermore, the rearward move of the Division cannot be delayed; forward ration dumps, which we are now consuming, are required for the advancing Armies. The case has been referred to General Alexander personally and he has ruled that we must move as soon as possible, much as he sympathises with the desire of all ranks to visit the city for which they have fought so hard and so long. It is hoped that it may be possible to send up, at a later date, a number of men to visit Rome.

“During our prolonged spell of fighting we have sustained heavy casualties and have not had the opportunity of retraining the team so as to keep up to the Divisional standard of fighting efficiency. That standard is the highest in the British Army and we shall now have the opportunity to regain it. It is the skill of the trained professional fighter, and nothing else, which confers the ability to kill the enemy without incurring unnecessary casualties ourselves.”

The Scots Fusiliers were more fortunate than some other Battalions, as they were allowed four days in which to explore the Italian capital, where they danced to the pipes and were hung with garlands by the Roman population. On the afternoon of the day they left for Pignataro near Naples, the Divisional Commander paid a visit to Battalion Headquarters to decorate Sergeant J. Kenny of the Signal Platoon with the Military Medal for gallantry during operations in The Claw at Anzio.

The first stage of re-training to the highest fighting efficiency, which had been forecast in the recent Order of the Day, began at Pignataro. The first Battalion training instruction set the tone, in these words: “The coming four months are to be devoted to *intensive* training. As the Divisional Commander says: ‘Sweat now saves blood later.’ This point of view must be drummed into every man, i.e., the harder he works and the more he learns now, the less risk he runs of being killed later on. Unless the Battalion is well-trained when it re-enters battle, no amount of personal gallantry nor willingness will alone achieve success; and failure in battle means mud on our fair name. There will be six full working days. This means no holidays or days off.” The move to the Middle East came too soon, however, for more than a beginning to be made. At Pignataro there were short route marches and physical training, carried out under continual rain or cloud in bleak surroundings. The Divisional Commander held another investiture at which he decorated Major G. E. Bances with the Military Cross and Sergeant J. Finnie with the Military Medal. There were visits to Naples, tabloid sports, bathing, and a victory at football against the 6th Seaforth.

The Fusiliers moved to a camp near the port of Taranto on June 30, and three days later embarked in the S.S. *Banfora* together with the 2nd Northamptonshires and the headquarters of the 5th Division and of the 17th Brigade. On July 5 the convoy sailed southwards, keeping in sight familiar landmarks on the east coast of Sicily, among them Mount Etna, Augusta, Syracuse and the beaches at Avola, where the Battalion had landed in July 1943.

The Scots Fusiliers had been in Italy just four days short of a year. The Garigliano battle had cost them 11 casualties, and the final encounter at Anzio over 200, including nine officers and two warrant officers, who were Company Sergeant-Majors Williams and Gibson.

Chapter XII

THE INVASION OF FRANCE—
6th and 11th Battalions—1944

*6th Bn: Coast defence and training at home—The battles of the Odon—” Operation Bluecoat
“—Over the Seine—The Aart bridgehead—Into Holland*

*11th Battalion: Coast defence and training at home— Fontenay-le-Pesnel—Vimont—The
pursuit to the Seine—Le Havre—Into Belgium*

6th Bn: Coast defence and training at home

THE 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers, after their withdrawal from France in 1940, rejoined their parent division, the 15th (Scottish) with which they served throughout the remainder of the war. After a short stay at Gales, in Ayrshire, the Battalion played its part in the coastal defence of South-East England, where its sector of the beaches extended from Walton-on-the-Naze to Frinton Sands. When at Colchester, the Battalion was visited by its Honorary Colonel, the Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, who had commanded the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers during the first World War. On July 12 1940 Lieutenant-Colonel N. Macleod took over command of the Battalion. At that time all troops in the United Kingdom were at action stations to repel a German invasion, but by the end of September the Battle of Britain had virtually been won by Fighter Command of the Royal Air Force, and tension for the moment relaxed.

During the year 1941 the Battalion was employed in coast defence duties in Suffolk. Its allotted sector included the “Leiston Gap “, which was considered a likely area for a German landing. This brought many visitors from the higher command, including the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces. Miles of beach defences, dannert wire, tubular scaffolding and other obstacles were erected, and the Battalion took part in strenuous training exercises up to Corps Level.

By the end of 1941 the 15th Division had relieved the 59th Division in Northumberland, the Scots Fusiliers going to Gosforth. A year later the 15th became a mixed division of two infantry brigades and one tank brigade. As a result of this reorganisation the 45th Infantry Brigade, to which the Scots Fusiliers belonged, was separated from the Division; but the Fusiliers remained, joining the 44th Brigade, in which were also the 8th Royal Scots and the 6th King’s Own Scottish Borderers, a partnership which was to last throughout the campaign in North West Europe. The armour added to the 15th Division was the 6th Guards Tank Brigade, equipped with Churchill tanks, consisting of the 4th Tank Grenadier Guards, the 4th Tank Coldstream Guards and the 3rd Tank Scots Guards. The Fusiliers were affiliated to the 4th Tank Coldstream Guards. Early in 1943 the Battalion had an unexpected spell of training in combined operations with the Royal Navy at Rothesay, but returned later in the year to camp under canvas at Gunnerton, before moving to Hexham and Knaresborough. Meanwhile the tactical concept of the mixed division had fallen into disfavour. The 6th Tank Brigade again became an independent formation, and the 15th Division reverted to its former composition of three infantry brigades, retaining the 44th and 46th Brigades and taking in the 227th Brigade from Inverness.

Lieutenant-Colonel Macleod left the Battalion to assume command of the 136th Infantry Brigade, and was succeeded by Major C. R. Buchanan from within the Battalion, whose promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel was confirmed on December 16. His early days of command were filled with preparations for the cross-Channel invasion. At 3 a.m. on June 10, five days after “Operation Overlord” had been set in motion, the 15th Division was ordered to be ready to move at a moment’s notice from mid-day. On June 11 the ships carrying the Fusiliers joined a convoy

at the mouth of the Thames. Four years, almost to a day, after their evacuation from Le Havre in 1940, the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers were about to land again in France.

6th Bn: The battles of the Odon

The 15th Division went into action with the 31st Armoured Brigade, supported by a barrage which swept forward over the rain-soaked fields and hedges of Normandy. The infantry crossed the Caen-Tilley road and entered Cheux, whence the armoured brigade was to make a dash for the Odon Bridges. The task given to the 15th Division by XIII Corps was to break out through the 3rd Canadian Division west of Caen and south of Brettenville l'Orgueilleuse to the Odon, thus allowing the 11th Armoured Division and the 4th Armoured Brigade to push through and encircle Caen from the west. The 44th Brigade was to attack on the left of the divisional front, and the task of the Scots Fusiliers was to capture St. Mauvieu on the banks of the Muc, where it flowed through a hollow behind the Rauray ridge, running south-westwards towards Cheux.

The St. Mauvieu attack was launched from the southern outskirts of Norrey-en-Bessin at 7.30 a.m. on June 25. The ground was typical Norman farmland, with ridges, hedges and furrows. The Scots Fusiliers attacked with "A" Company forward on the left, and "B" "on the right. Corn stood high in the fields and St. Mauvieu was hardly visible from the start line, which was under fire, as was also the open left flank towards Carpiquet airfield. The 12th Special Service Panzer (Hitler Youth) Division held the front. In the morning the weather became so thick that air support was abandoned.

Three hundred and forty-four British guns opened fire as the Fusilier companies moved forward. Yet a heavy toll was taken by the German defensive fire, and every yard was a struggle until the first stage of the attack was reached, the Norrey-en-Bessin road to St. Mauvieu. Eventually "C" and "D" Companies, although much weakened by casualties, penetrated into the village and began the task of clearing it. All day there was confused fighting. However, by late afternoon the northern end of St. Mauvieu had been cleared, though this was achieved only with help from armoured flame-throwers.

At about 6 p.m. elements of the 12th Special Service and 21st Panzer Divisions counter-attacked on the left flank of the Scots Fusiliers from Marcelet, a village about 2,000 yards east of St. Mauvieu. With some assistance the Battalion withstood this assault, but later in the day further reinforcements from the 44th Brigade had to be called up to beat off renewed attacks. The Battalion's casualties were now so heavy that the Brigade Commander, Brigadier H. D. K. Money, sent up the reserve Battalion, the 6th King's Own Scottish Borderers, to take over the position. By midnight on June 26, in torrential rain, the Fusiliers had moved into reserve in the vicinity of Le Mesnil Patry. Their casualties were 21 killed (including four officers, two of whom were company commanders), 113 wounded and nine missing. Nevertheless they had played a major part in opening the vital gap which has become known in military history as the "Scottish Corridor".

The 15th Division's attack continued and two bridges over the Odon at Gavrus were taken intact on June 27, completing the divisional task. By nightfall next day the armour, pouring out over the bridges, had encountered stiff resistance. The Scottish Corridor, extending south of Cheux, was only 2,500 yards wide and still open to flank attacks. A greatly weakened German 12th Special Service Division remained in the area, reinforced by elements of the 1st and 2nd

S.S. Panzer Divisions and the 2nd and 21st Panzer Divisions. Further, the 9th Special Service (*Hohenstaufen*) and 10th Special Service (*Fronks-berg*) Panzer Divisions, two of the crack German formations, had now arrived from the Russian front with unknown tank support. It was therefore highly improbable that an immediate, complete break-through was possible. Accordingly the 11th Armoured Division and the 4th Armoured Brigade were kept behind the Odon, while the 15th Division remained on the alert.

Cheux, slightly to the south-west of St. Mauvieu and served only by one indifferent road, was congested. Counter-attacks on the 15th Division's positions were launched by the Germans on June 29, a day of savage fighting along almost the whole western flank south of Le Haut du Bosq. The Royal Scots entered a wood surrounding the Chateau of Grainville, were driven out, and retook it; the Fusiliers then replaced them there.

During the relief the Germans counter-attacked strongly and the Fusiliers were caught while relieving "B" and "C" Companies of the Royal Scots. Enemy tanks picked off the forward anti-tank guns of the Royal Scots, while flame-throwing tanks penetrated into the forward company areas and inflicted heavy casualties before withdrawing. The German tanks returned again to bore deeply into the forward positions, followed by their infantry, and for a time there was considerable confusion. However, a squadron of the 4th Armoured Brigade supported by self-propelled guns of the 91st Anti-Tank Regiment beat back the attack, and the original positions were reoccupied. Late on June 29 the 6th K.O.S.B. relieved the Fusiliers and the Royal Scots, both of which established themselves in supporting positions in depth. All three Battalions were covering Le Haut du Bosq.

Early next morning the Fusiliers moved back to an orchard in Le Haut du Bosq. They rested until the afternoon and then occupied part of an anti-tank "hedgehog" position. During the night there was intermittent mortar fire, and before first light on July 1 the 9th S.S. and 2nd S.S. Panzer Divisions counter-attacked desperately, first from the south-west and later in the north-west. They were striking at the junction of XIII and XXX Corps astride the road from Noyers to Le Haut du Bosq. The sector of the front held by the K.O.S.B. was most heavily beset, and German tanks, hull-down, picked off the British anti-tank guns. Although partially surrounded after hours of heavy defensive fighting, the K.O.S.B. stood their ground. The Scots Fusiliers sent up "C" Company, supported by tanks and self-propelled anti-tank guns, to reinforce the K.O.S.B.'s open right flank. By early evening the battle had been won, and 15th Division was able to disengage and go into reserve. That day, according to the late Chester Wilmot, General Hausser, commanding the 2nd Special Service Panzer Corps, had made his last throw to eliminate the Odon salient, and was shaken by the resistance put up by the 49th and 15th Divisions. In continuously dreary weather the Scots Fusiliers then spent five uncomfortable days in the village of the St. Croix-Grande-Tonne near the Caen-Bayeux road, close to the area where they had concentrated after landing in Normandy.

The first battle of the Odon was now over. Lieutenant-General H. G. Martin observes in the official history of the 15th Division that 10 square miles of territory were taken in a drive five and a half miles deep into the enemy's vitals, and that for three days the Division held its ground against all challenge. Of the fighting along the whole front on July 1, General Montgomery judged that the German Special Service formations made their last and strongest attempt against the British Second Army's salient on that date, and that the massed British artillery devastatingly repulsed every attack except one.

On July 7 the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers, with the other Battalions of 44th Brigade, moved to the Odon line to relieve the 130th Brigade of the 43rd (Wessex) Division in the area of Tourville and Tourmauville astride the river, so that the 43rd could concentrate to the east and attack Evrecy. The Fusiliers marched to Baron, where they were in close touch with the enemy. Patrolling went on in fine, warm weather. The Battalion suffered several casualties from Nebelwerfers (also known to the troops as “moaning minnies” or “sobbing sisters”) while air bursts in the trees around Baron were especially troublesome and often drove the Fusiliers to cover. On July 10, when the 43rd Division attacked on the Fusiliers’ left, the Battalion suffered badly from enemy shelling and mortar fire, as the part of Baron which they occupied was a pre-selected enemy target. Between July 7 and July 12, when they were relieved by the 1/5th Welch Regiment and returned to the rest area at St. Croix-Grande-Tonne, they had lost 11 killed, 19 wounded and 2 missing.

XII Corps was now landing in Normandy and the 15th Division became the spearhead of a drive southward on Thury Harcourt. This phase began on July 15, directed against Bougy, Evrecy and Maizet. The 44th Brigade’s role was an attack south-westwards from Tourmauville to capture Gavrus and Bougy; for this the Scots Fusiliers were in reserve. Both objectives were taken by July 16, and early that morning “B” and “C” Companies of the Fusiliers with the Battalion’s antitank guns arrived in Gavrus. It was another uncomfortable period of severe enemy mortar fire and shelling. In capturing Bougy the Royal Scots had suffered badly, and the Fusiliers sent up “A” Company to help them to hold the village. Casualties were slight in spite of heavy shelling on that day and the next. “B” and “C” Companies sent out a patrol to discover whether the Germans had withdrawn, but it soon returned with news that the enemy was still present in strength. By next morning, however, the Germans had thinned out. The other units of the Brigade had been continuously engaged in heavy and confused fighting, and Evrecy still held out. Lying in a hollow at the foot of a forward slope in almost full view of the enemy, it was a difficult place to attack. The second battle of the Odon ended for the Fusiliers on the night of July 19/20, when they were relieved and marched back to a rest area at Le Haut du Bosq. Although not committed to the assault, the Battalion had suffered heavy casualties, numbering 14 killed, 54 wounded (including 4 officers), and 5 missing. In this operation the territorial gains were negligible, but the purpose of drawing German armour from the American front had been achieved.

Towards the end of July the 15th Division moved unexpectedly to Caumont, the hinge between the British and American lines. The Scots Fusiliers travelled in tracked vehicles by way of Bayeux and Balleroy. The Division, under command of XXX Corps, relieved the 5th United States Infantry Division in the left sector of the 1st United States Army’s front, so that the American break-out could be strengthened. After the Odon battlefield, Caumont was deceptively peaceful. There had been little fighting here and the Bocage landscape was practically unscarred. Butter and eggs were plentiful, the cows had survived and fresh milk was plentiful. The German opposing formation, the 326th Division, apparently wished to avoid trouble for as long as possible.

6th Bn: *“Operation Bluecoat”*

During darkness on July 23 the Fusiliers, with the other Battalions of the 44th Brigade, took over from the 10th United States Regimental Group a sector between La Vacquerie and Caumont,

while the 227th Brigade relieved the 11th Regimental Group between Caumont and Le Repas. On July 26, however, the 44th Brigade was relieved by the 46th Brigade and went into reserve at Mesnil. The American break-out west of St. Lo had begun on July 25. On the same day the 2nd Canadian Corps attacked southwards along the Caen-Falaise road. General Montgomery directed the British Second Army, commanded by General Dempsey, into an offensive in the quiet Caumont sector. This was "Operation Bluecoat", the objects of which were to cover the American flank, and to seize the Mont Pincon ridge and Vire so as to prevent a controlled movement backward by the Germans under pressure from the 1st United States Army, under General Bradley. In preparation for this assault the 44th Brigade returned from Mesnil and took over the whole divisional front in Caumont, while the 46th and 227th Brigades moved straight to their assembly areas for the offensive.

The 15th Division was under command of VIII Corps for the operation. Its initial task on July 30 was to cut through the enemy defences south of Caumont and establish itself on Quarry Hill, a high feature west of Bois du Homme, in order to clear a path for the armour of VIII Corps and to protect the right flank of XXX Corps. Under command of the 15th Division were the 6th Guards Tank Brigade, a squadron of the Household Cavalry Regiment and a squadron of the Lothians and Border Horse. Simultaneously, on the right of the 15th, the 11th Armoured Division was to advance southwards on Dampierre, while on the left the 43rd Division was to take Cahanges and Point 361, to the east of Bois du Homme.

July 30 was a Sunday, cloudy and sultry and unfavourable for a full scale air bombardment. Seven weeks in the congested Normandy bocage had given the Germans time to build strong entrenchments on the slopes and ridges north and west of Mont Pincon. The Camerons and Gordons of the 227th Brigade, supported by tanks of the 44th Brigade, opened the offensive at 6.55 a.m. without a preliminary bombardment. On the left the 43rd Division was quickly stopped by minefields, and the 11th Armoured Division on the other flank encountered the same obstruction. The 15th Division with the 6th Guards Tank Brigade overran the advanced defences, and in the evening gained the crest of Hill 309 having achieved a penetration of five miles since that morning. By the morning of August 1 the 11th Armoured Division was in Le Beny Bocage, and a deep cleft had been driven between the German Seventh Army and Fifth Panzer Army. Vire was a hub of the German traffic system, and although the Americans had been slowed down, British armour was threatening the slender defences of the town by the afternoon of August 1. However, as Vire was an American objective, VIII Corps was switched towards Flers and to the rear of Mont Pincon, which unfortunately allowed the Germans to extricate themselves and to organise the defence of Vire. The British armour was halted, the Guards at Estray and the 11th Armoured on the road from Vire to Vassy. XXX Corps was not yet forward and the armour remained where it was until infantry could be brought up.

The Scots Fusiliers came into the battle on August 3 in course of 44th Brigade's task of clearing two ridges on the north and south banks of the river Soulevre, east of Catheolles. That morning the Guards Armoured Division fought a tank and infantry battle round Arclais, overlooking Catheolles. Further north, the enemy stopped the 15th Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment outside St. Pierre Tarentaine. The northern ridge of Arclais was to be taken by the Fusiliers that afternoon, and the southern slope by the Royal Scots and the K.O.S.B. next morning, on August 4. The Arclais ridge was steep, long and narrow, and well wooded. The Fusiliers rode to battle from Le Tourneur on the supporting tanks of the 4th Grenadier Guards,

approaching from the west. As the bridge had been destroyed, they had to ford a stream which ran round the foot of the ridge from the north and joined the Soulevre slightly east of Catheolles. On the ridge was the farmhouse of La Cour. Preliminary reconnaissance proved difficult, as it was impossible to find a suitable observation post which gave a useful view of the objective. Consequent adjustments delayed the attack for half an hour, but at 9 p.m., in fading light, the Battalion crossed the start line. All except four of the tanks became bogged on the near side of the stream, but the Fusiliers carried the slope and went on to the plateau above and to Les Haies. The farm of La Cour, set ablaze by artillery fire, made an excellent guiding light, and by 10.30 p.m. the Fusiliers had reached their objective, the high ground overlooking Montcharival.

Next morning a successful attack on the southern slopes was made by the Royal Scots and the K.O.S.B., who quickly established themselves on ground above Montcharival overlooking Montchamp and Estry. Later in the day the Fusiliers, supported by a squadron of the 4th Grenadier Tanks, cleared and occupied Montcharival, which had been held by about a company of Germans with some armoured cars. Here they linked up with the forward troops, coming from the north, of the 43rd (Welsh) Division, which attacked and took Montchamp; while the eastward advance, which was continued by the K.O.S.B. and the Royal Scots, cleared the southern ridge to La Motte.

During August 5 the Fusiliers remained in Montcharival, while the 227th Brigade passed through to attack Lassy and Estry. On the right, the American V Corps had closed on Vire from the north and linked up with the 11th Armoured Division not far from the town. On the left, the 43rd Division made contact in Montamy with the 15th Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment. Villers-Bocage had been taken by XXX Corps, but the enemy still held a line from Vire, through Estry, Le Caverie and Mont Pincon, to Aunay-sur-Odon. To the south-west, the Americans from St. Lo were now turning eastward, while the 1st Canadian Army was resuming its advance to the southeast towards Falaise.

It was thought at first that the Germans were retreating from the area about Lassy and Estry; but this view was modified on August 5 and 6, when the 46th and 227th Brigades were repulsed after passing through the Scots Fusiliers at Montcharival and the Royal Scots and K.O.S.B. in Les Ficefes and La Motte. On August 8 the Fusiliers and the K.O.S.B., supported by the 4th Grenadier Tanks with flame-throwers, went forward to deal with Estry. "A" and "C" Companies of the Fusiliers were to clear the village while "B" and "D" Companies dug in on the line of the main road behind them. The leading companies crossed the start line, a stream to the north-west of Estry, and reached the northern end of the village practically unassisted, as the tanks and flame-throwers were held up in the dense bocage and narrow sunken lanes. The tanks, in fact, never reached the start line. Thick hedges, trees and gardens gave ideal cover to the enemy defence, and the Germans had 88-millimetre guns and mortars emplaced in the houses, to support their infantry armed with machine guns, rifles, and bazookas. The field of fire on the village was restricted to no more than 100 yards. Despite all their efforts "A" and "C" Companies failed to enter the village itself, where well sited positions, including securely dug-in tanks near the Church, a strong point, finally held up the attack. The Fusiliers were counter-attacked by German infantry led by Mark IV tanks, while the K.O.S.B. on their right met equally tough opposition and by mid-afternoon on August 8 the advance was everywhere at a standstill.

"D" Company of the Fusiliers was able to dig itself into position, practically unmolested, but "B" Company, which had been heavily shelled and bombed by mortars on the start line and

greatly reduced in numbers, was established only shortly before dark. As night fell "A" and "C" Companies disengaged from the attack and retired to the firm base provided by "D" Company behind a crossroads outside Estry, leaving only one platoon of "C" Company forward of the Vire to Estry road. During the hours of darkness the Fusiliers were subjected to continuous mortar fire, as they remained in close contact with the enemy, and German tanks patrolled the adjacent orchards throughout the night. Casualties were heavy.

At this stage VIII Corps launched an armoured drive against Flers through the firm base established by the 15th Division, and the Royal Scots moved up in support of the Fusiliers and the K.O.S.B. at Estry; but no headway was made. Lieutenant-Colonel Buchanan, commanding the Scots Fusiliers, was wounded but continued in the fight until evening, when he was taken back. Major I. Mackenzie then assumed command.

The 3rd Division and the Guards from Vire had now begun their south-easterly drive on Flers. The 15th Division was held ready to take advantage of any enemy retirement. The Royal Scots, who had replaced the Scots Fusiliers at Estry, finding next day that the Germans had gone, occupied the town and pushed on to Le Thiel. "Operation Bluecoat" had achieved its purpose by intercepting the armoured reinforcements intended for the German Seventh Army, which was now being forced back on Vire and Mortain; while the Third United States Army was hastening into Brittany, the secure possession of which was essential for further Allied movement eastward.

6th Bn: Over the Seine

After "Operation Bluecoat" the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers rested in the area of St. Pierre Tarentaine, where they received messages of congratulation from Lieutenant-General Sir Miles Dempsey, the Army Commander; from Lieutenant-General Sir Richard O'Connor, commanding VIII Corps; from Major-General G. H. A. MacMillan; and from Major-General C. M. Barber, who had assumed command of the 15th Division when General Macmillan was wounded. General O'Connor considered that "Bluecoat" was the Division's best battle so far in North West Europe. The Scots Fusiliers rested and refitted, first at Amaye-sur-Orne and later in a valley beyond Thury Harcourt.

General Montgomery's plan was a wide envelopment of the Seine, and a crossing of that river in which the 15th Division would again be the spearhead. The Second Army's target on gaining the far bank was the area embracing Arras, Amiens and St. Pol. On the Second Army's right the First United States Army was to advance northeastwards, while on its left the 1st Canadian Army was to clear the Channel ports. The 5th Division's assault was to be directed across the most westerly of the S-shaped loops of the Seine. The 227th Brigade, in the centre, was to cross the river at St Pierre du Vauvray; the 44th Brigade, on the left, at Portjoie; and finally the 46th Brigade, on the right. The assault was to begin on August 27. The part of the river chosen for the crossing was between 200 and 300 yards wide, with high hills beyond. The 15th Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment had already crossed at Portjoie and advanced as far as Hurqueville, meeting little opposition.

In the first infantry crossing the 227th Brigade went over in daylight at 7.15 p.m. and established a bridgehead. At 12.30 a.m. on August 28 the Scots Fusiliers led the 44th Brigade's assault in boats; they came under light machine gun fire in the darkness and suffered a few casualties, but opposition was not strong and by 2 a.m. the Battalion was across. By 5 a.m. the

bridgehead was established and the few enemy found in the area had been cleared. The other Battalions had been equally successful, and the bridgehead was now deep and solid. On the same night the Fusiliers moved north up a steep hill, dislodged some Germans from the high ground and took Senneville. On August 30 the 7th Armoured Division passed through the 44th Brigade's bridgehead, followed next day by the 53rd Division. Meanwhile the 5th Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment had made contact with the 2nd Canadian Corps at Fleury; the bridgeheads of the three Corps, XXX, XII, and II Canadian, had been joined.

For the moment, however, the rapid advance had strained the 15th Division's transport, and its units remained in the bridgehead area. They had a gay time, swimming and enjoying the welcome they received from the local inhabitants. The advance into Belgium was imminent. A bridge over the Somme between Amiens and Abbeville was taken, and on September 3 the 15th Division crossed. On the same day the Guards Armoured Division entered Brussels and the Second British Army was ordered to drive for the Rhine. The units which had broken out from the bridgehead on the Seine encountered stiff resistance round La Bassee, Bethune, and north of St Pol, the area in which the Germans had built the launching sites for their flying bombs, and the armour by-passed these places, leaving the 53rd Division to clear them. At this stage the Second Army was flanked on the right by the First United States Army on a line from Namur to Tirlemont, and on the left by the 1st Canadian Army, which was far behind at Le Havre. In the area bounded by Antwerp, Ghent, Lille, Bethune and Hesdin a considerable number of Germans were at large, who might make a dash for the Channel fortresses, break out across the Scheldt estuary, or go eastwards over the River Lys to the south-west of Ghent. The XII Corps was given the task of preventing the last of those possibilities.

During the advance towards the Lys with the rest of the 44th Brigade, the Fusiliers came in for their share of a series of tumultuous welcomes. On the way from St. Pol, south of Lille, through Bethune, La Bassee, Hulluch, and Loos, it was often impossible to make a way through the great throngs of people who were waiting to cheer the troops. On September 6 at Halluin, on the Belgian border, the demonstrating crowds reached such proportions that they stopped the 44th Brigade's advance. A scene in which the Scots Fusiliers, the K.O.S.B. and the Royal Scots were involved is described in *Normandy to the Baltic* by "Advocate" (the pen-name of the Brigade Intelligence Officer) as follows: "Ten thousand people in the streets of the town cheered themselves hoarse. Houses and people were smothered in enormous Belgian flags of black, yellow and red. The Belgian Maquis were already in charge of Halluin. The vanguard of the King's Own Scottish Borderers with their carriers and jeeps was lost in the excited mob. At one end of the town, across a destroyed bridge over the canal, the rearguards of the enemy still sniped at the Maquis."

A bridge over the Lys at Lauwe, a few miles east of Halluin, was intact, and the K.O.S.B. moved into the XII Corps bridgehead area. The Scots Fusiliers and Royal Scots continued further eastwards to Courtrai, where the Royal Scots took over Courtrai from the Seaforth, while the Fusiliers relieved the Glasgow Highlanders on the Courtrai-Bossuyt Canal. On the evening of September 7 the Fusiliers crossed the canal east of Courtrai, attacked Deerlyck on the German escape route, taking 75 prisoners, and spent an eventful night ambushing unsuspecting enemy convoys. Next day the Royal Scots crossed north-east of Courtrai and established themselves at Harlebeke, while the Fusiliers went on north-eastwards to Zulte, raising their total prisoners taken to 335 in two days. Lastly, the K.O.S.B. passed through both the other Battalions to reach

Deynze; so that the 44th Brigade held a line running north-eastwards along the twisting course of the Lys, well placed to cut off German withdrawal to the east. Meanwhile the 227th Brigade of the 15th Division was in the area of St. Denis, Nazareth and Machelen, and the 46th in Audenarde Gavere and Scheldrode. German resistance was quickly subdued and the front cleared for advance into Holland. Soon the Fusiliers were on their way to a concentration area near Malines, between Brussels and Antwerp, to play their part, in General Montgomery's plan for" Operation Market Garden

6th Bn: *The Aart bridgehead*

This operation was the prelude to a thrust for the Rhine crossings, over which lay the path into Germany. The de Groot bridgehead, beyond the Merest Escaut Junction Canal, was to be used as a springboard by XXX Corps for a northward advance to Arnhem over the intervening water obstacles secured by the First Airborne Army. Two other corps were to protect the flanks and widen the base of the Arnhem attack. VIII Corps was assigned to the right and XII Corps to the left, each to break out from their own canal bridgeheads. In preparation for this thrust, two brigades of the 5th Division in XII Corps moved from Malines into the Gheel bridgehead beyond the Albert Canal, relieving the 50th Division. The 44th Brigade relieved the 51st Brigade on the right, and the 46th Brigade the 69th Brigade on the left, on the afternoon of September 14.

Gheel, previously lost in a counter-attack, was cleared by the Royal Scots on the morning of September 13. It was then intended to repeat the tactics which had proved successful at the Seine, by rushing the Junction Canal on a wide front before the enemy suspected or was prepared. However, when the K.O.S.B. pushed forward on the road to Rethy, which crosses the canal four miles north-east of Gheel, and reached the south bank at 11 p.m., they found the road bridge blown; and on the Turnhout road, which crosses the canal at Aart, two and three-quarter miles north of Gheel, the Royal Scots struck the canal in the late afternoon to find both the road bridge and the bypass bridge in ruins.

A section of the K.O.S.B. which crossed the canal in the dark, early in the morning of September 14, was engaged at pointblank range and isolated, while the remainder of the company was enfiladed with intense 88-millimetre gun and mortar fire. The K.O.S.B. crossing failed. Meanwhile the Germans had opened the canal locks and flooded the battle area until there were two feet of water on the Rethy road and a flood spreading westwards. The Royal Scots were more successful. From 5.30 a.m. the leading companies had been crossing the canal in assault boats, and they established a bridgehead as planned to the west of Aart. Another company followed, clearing the surrounding farms and the houses of Aart, including a dominating factory building. The bridgehead was thus extended to the open country beyond the town, and was firmly established by 10 a.m., but not without severe losses, most of which were inflicted by twin-barrelled anti-aircraft guns used by the enemy as ground weapons.

An attempt by the Field Company of Royal Engineers attached to the 44th Brigade to span the canal with a class 9 bridge was foiled by the collapse of the canal bank under the sweep of flood water. The only alternative was to construct a bridge or ferry with folding-boat equipment, and by this means and at some cost in casualties a few anti-tank guns were ferried over to the Royal Scots. The intention to pass the Scots Fusiliers over to the eastward of the Royal Scots was frustrated by the rising waters, although it was still hoped that the rest of the Brigade would be

able to cross after dark. Serious trouble, however, began to develop at about 10 p.m. According to Martin: "General Student of the 1st Parachute Army, who was responsible for this sector of the German front, had made up his mind to prevent at all costs the 15th Scottish Division's break-out over the Junction Canal... he had sent up the Hermann Goering Training Regiment post-haste from Rotterdam; he had formed a collecting centre at Turnhout where all German troops arriving from the west were to be reorganised, provided with Special Service officers and non-commissioned officers and hurried south to Aart; and he had sent into action on the canal guns of every type from the artillery school close by Bourg Leopold, manned by the school's crack N.C.O. instructors."

Enemy Air Force troops, meanwhile, overran a company headquarters of the Royal Scots and badly cut up two other companies. Two companies of the Hermann Goering Regiment swept through Aart, firing and yelling and got right up to the rafting site on the canal bank, but the position of the far bank was partly restored by a company of the Royal Scots. During a night of desperate fighting the situation became obscure. At dawn on September 15 the bridgehead was found to have been reduced to 250 yards in width and much less in depth.

The Scots Fusiliers moved up to the canal soon after first light, preparatory to launching a new attack. It was raining heavily when they crossed in assault boats at about noon, in an attempt to expand the congested bridgehead area westwards and northwards. One company succeeded in clearing the west side of the main street of Aart and another the east, and by 2.30 in the afternoon the whole of Aart, the heart of the bridgehead, was restored to the Division. Two heavy counter-attacks by the Hermann Goering Regiment were launched down the axis of the road directly at the Scots Fusiliers. To the west of the road the enemy had some success, until halted by a Royal Scots company acting in support. To the east the Fusiliers resisted strongly, but were eventually compelled to withdraw, so that the bridgehead was again reduced to almost its original size.

The K.O.S.B. were launched across the canal at 6 p.m. to widen the perimeter to north and west, but finding themselves in the middle of a confused battle had to settle as best they could into company areas instead of joining with the Scots Fusiliers in a co-ordinated attack, as had been planned. The K.O.S.B. reported: "We are ringed with enemy riflemen at short range." The Scots Fusiliers reported: "Unable to form up because of heavy counter-attacks." The Glasgow Highlanders, now under command of the 44th Brigade, had to remain on the south bank, concentrated astride the road north of Gheel.

Shortage of ammunition was now causing anxiety, owing to lengthy communications and the restraints imposed by the anticipated demands of "Operation Market Garden", with the result that the 44th Brigade had to restrict its calls for defensive fire to the repelling of counter-attacks. The Germans were at no such disadvantage, and in the Aart bridgehead during the night of September 16/17 the canal ferry site was very heavily shelled. The initiative still belonged to the enemy, as was discovered when a morning attack by a combined force of Scots Fusiliers and K.O.S.B. was forestalled. The counterattack on the bridgehead was so determined that the Fusiliers could not reach their start line, and the K.O.S.B. were subjected to heavy shelling and small arms fire. The fighting persisted all day, while the water level rose until at 4 p.m. it was bank high and had begun to submerge the Scots Fusiliers' positions on the south-east side of Aart, which were below bank level and already water-logged. Fortunately the flood then rose no further.

At 8 p.m. on September 16 the enemy returned to the attack. A German Battalion was launched at the Scots Fusiliers in the "Red House" position, and pressure was extended along the whole eastern face of the bridgehead; but the Fusiliers beat off the leading waves of the assault while supporting artillery dealt with the enemy forces coming up. After an hour's fighting, in which they took heavy punishment, the Germans turned their attention to the western face; but again the British guns dispersed the attackers as they formed up. A German situation report, which later fell into British hands, said of this day:

"The 15th Scottish Infantry Division... fights toughly and stubbornly."

On the morning of September 17 the bridgehead was barely 400 yards in depth. The enemy effected another minor penetration, but this was soon repulsed. The Royal Scots, who had lost 230, officers and men, were relieved. That morning the 15th Division watched the Dakota aircraft and gliders of the 1st Airborne Army pass overhead towards Arnhem, a sign that "Operation Market Garden" had begun. This, and the fierce resistance at Aart, decided the XII Corps Commander to transfer his main axis of advance to two new bridgeheads well to the east of Gheel: he gave the new task to the 53rd Division, retaining the 15th Division at Aart.

During the day of September 17 the Aart bridgehead was extended slightly eastwards, and the enemy responded by bombarding the south bank with heavy-calibre shells. In the evening the Argylls sent over reconnaissance parties, which found Scots Fusiliers and K.O.S.B. strangely mingled in their positions. The main body of the Argylls crossed the canal after dark and relieved the Scots Fusiliers, who withdrew to a concentration area east of Gheel. All day on September 18 the Argylls and K.O.S.B., alone in the Aart bridgehead, sustained heavy attacks and constant shellfire from the enemy, who were evidently nervous of a break-out. Next day the K.O.S.B. handed over to the Gordons and re-crossed the canal, thus transferring responsibility for the bridgehead to the 46th Brigade. The 44th Brigade had first won the bridgehead and then held it for five days, during which it had repelled 13 counter-attacks. It had lost 24 officers and 513 other ranks, but had not been dislodged. The 6th Scots Fusiliers had suffered casualties who would be sadly missed. Amongst them were Major Pollock-Morris and Captain Picken, M.C., both veterans of the Battalion.

In a letter to the Divisional Commander received on September 19, Lieutenant-General Ritchie, commanding XII Corps, stated: "General Horrocks, commanding XXX Corps told me he had grave doubts as to the possibility of his being able reasonably quickly to break out of his bridgehead in 'Operation Market Garden'. The fact that he has been able to do so with such speed he attributes very largely to the fact that a very great proportion of the enemy's available reserves have been drawn against the 15th Division front."

On September 19 the 44th Brigade moved eastward to take over positions on the canal from the Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment, allotting to the Scots Fusiliers a sector about Sluis.

6th Bn: Into Holland

When the town of Eindhoven had been captured by American paratroops during the recent airborne operations, a crossing at Zon on the Wilhelmina Canal had also been taken, but the bridge had been destroyed. However, bridges had been found intact at St. Oedenrode on the River Dommel, and at Veghel on the Willems Waart Canal. Thus roads were opened for XXX Corps and it was able to advance and seize the great Nijmegen bridge over the Maas.

Nevertheless two attacks by Field-Marshal von Rundstedt between St. Oedenrode and Eindhoven temporarily cut the XXX Corps axis and created a disturbing situation. The critical point was at Zon on the Wilhelmina Canal, east of which lay the German 1st Parachute Army and westward the remnants of the German I 5th Army. It became a matter of urgency to protect the left flank of XXX Corps against interference by the I 5th Army. Accordingly the bridgehead at Aart was handed over to the 7th Armoured Division, with the 227th Brigade under command; the 46th Brigade was placed under command of the 53rd Division; while the 15th Division prepared to cross the Wilhelmina Canal. The 46th Brigade went over the waterway by a sagging bridge between Zon and Oerschot on the road to Best and Boxtel. The 44th Brigade hastened forward and entered Holland less than 48 hours after its ordeal at Aart.

The Seaforth of the 46th Brigade made the opening attack on Best. According to their patrols the place was unoccupied; but their vanguard encountered and shot a German cyclist, Whereupon the enemy appeared from every house and drove the leading company from the town with the loss of 33 officers and men. The long drawn out struggle for Best, fought without armour, was then taken up by the Glasgow Highlanders, who achieved only moderate success. The 44th Brigade came up, and the K.O.S.B.'s were sent to outflank Best by way of Zonche Wood and the village of Steenweg, in a countryside still littered with Allied parachutes. The XXX Corps axis was again cut that afternoon, September 22, between Veghel and Uden. The 43rd Division, striving to join forces with the 1st Airborne Division, was stopped at Elst, four miles short of Arnhem. For a time the 44th Brigade was placed under Army command at one hour's notice to attack and re-open the road, but was later relieved of that role by the 227th Brigade.

The Best front was proving stubborn, as the bridgehead was occupied by two German Battalions, well protected and armed with mortars and machine guns. The enemy repulsed a three-Battalion attack by the 46th Brigade on September 23, and punished the attackers severely the following day. In attempting to break out northwards towards a strip of woodland the 44th Brigade suffered casualties in the fighting which followed on a stretch of heathland covered with close scrub which lay between it and its objective. In this enterprise the Scots Fusiliers followed their own fighting patrols into Vleut, which they occupied shortly afterwards. During the afternoon the Germans again cut the XXX Corps axis, south of Veghel. In the circumstances the 44th Brigade was ordered to consolidate the recent slender gains beyond the Wilhelmina Canal; the Scots Fusiliers to hold Vleut; the K.O.S.B. the main crossroads on the Boxtel road; and the Royal Scots a position further down that road.

Another effort on September 25 by the 227th Brigade in the Best neighbourhood again proved unavailing. The Scots Fusiliers, after clearing Vleut and Hoefke, sent a company eastwards along the road to St. Oedenrode. This company encountered a strong defensive area in the Donderdonk Woods, but too late in the day to mount an attack. That morning Field-Marshal Montgomery had extricated what remained of the 1st Airborne Division from Arnhem. On September 26, in a final attempt to open the jaws of the vice at Best, the 46th Brigade succeeded in capturing the factory there; but Best itself was so strongly held that the divisional front had to be extended to by-pass the town northward to the River Dommel. The 227th Brigade with the Scots Fusiliers under command launched an attack in this new direction, with a belt of woods south of Leimde as the final objective. The Seaforth were involved in desperate fighting in this thick woodland, but the Highland Light Infantry on the right and the Fusiliers on the left met weaker resistance and took over 100 prisoners between them. With the

object of blocking any enemy movement from the west, the Brigade then occupied a position along the southern edge of the woods. After this action the Scots Fusiliers reverted to the 1st Brigade. On September 28 they took part in a successful Brigade attack north-westwards on Fratershoef, thus securing the northern flank of the 15th Division up to the Dommel. There the Brigade remained, repelling one heavy counter-attack by a training unit of young German airmen before it was relieved on October 1.

Lieutenant-General Martin has written:

“The Army had outrun its supplies. It lacked artillery and shells, tank bridges and tank brigades. Above all, its men were tired. In all the fighting in Holland that followed, the exhaustion of the army, both physical and material, became absolute. The enemy, on the other hand, falling back on reinforcements and supplies, had been steadily regaining cohesion and poise.

“By now the 15th Division was long overdue for relief. For 100 days it had never been out of range of the enemy’s guns and in that time it had only one week’s rest. From the Bois Halbout to the Dommel it had come 400 miles with no rest at all. It had had no time whatever to assimilate the countless small drafts it had received. Exhausted, weak in numbers and inadequately supported, the 15th Division had found itself pitted

once more against young and fanatical troops in extremely strong, defensive positions. It had fought devotedly. As long as it was called upon to do so, it would still fight on—but to ever-lessening purpose. Soon its fighting would serve merely to lengthen its casualty lists still further. The 15th was relieved at last.”

On October 1 the 51st (Highland) Division, which had not joined in the pursuit in the Low Countries, arrived from I Corps and replaced the 15th Division in XII Corps. The 15th was taken out of the line. The Royal Scots Fusiliers and the Royal Scots withdrew eastwards about 10 miles to Gemert, north of Helmond, where they remained with 44th Brigade Headquarters for three weeks of training, refitting and resting. The troops acquired as interpreters young members of the local Resistance Movement, and formed warm friendships amongst the Dutch population. Relaxation was provided by the cinema, football tournaments, and the activities of the massed pipes and drums, which did much to entertain the people of Gemert and Helmond.

11th Battalion: Coast defence and training at home

The 11th Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers was formed on June 5 1940, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel W. M. Syfret. As soon as the unit had reached field strength it took over coastal defence duties with the 76th Infantry Division in Norfolk, where it remained for two years before joining the 147th Brigade of the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division. The period in Norfolk, according to the records, was not dissimilar to those experienced by other formations at that stage of the war: “It was marked by boredom and physical discomfort.” Training consisted almost entirely of exercises in range practice, mine detection and clearance, night marches and dawn attacks. Non-commissioned officers and men arrived from the infantry training centres of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, the King’s Own Scottish Borderers and the Border Regiment to be absorbed and given further training. From time to time German aircraft bombed and machine-gunned the forward positions of the Battalion, and there were some casualties.

The Battalion joined the 49th Division on September 7, 1942, when it moved to Penypont at Llandrindod in Wales. Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. J. Montgomery-Cunninghame had assumed

command on June 15 in succession to Lieutenant-Colonel Syfret, who left to take over the 20th Primary Training Centre. In the winter of 1942 the Fusiliers moved to Chepstow, where cadres were formed for mountain training. In 1943 the Battalion moved from Chepstow to Cumnock in Ayrshire, and later to Perthshire where it carried out part of its new programme of training in assault crossings, infantry-tank cooperation and attacking pill-boxes and strong-points such as might be encountered during a seaborne invasion. The 49th Division was selected from May 11 1943 as a beach assault formation. The 11th Battalion was told by its commanding officer: "We have a lot to learn and not very much time to learn it in." The Division went to the West of Scotland to take part in day and night endurance tests of some severity, embarking and disembarking through the sides and over the bows of ships at Rothesay and Inverary. It trained also in the areas of Lowesmuir, Watson, Irvine, Maybole, Drumclog, Stewarton and Saltcoats, and visited Leith to practise street-fighting.

The last days of 1943 brought disappointing news. The 49th Division was being replaced in the assault role by a battle-experienced division; it was to remain, however, in an assault corps as a "follow-up" division. The 11th Battalion crossed uneventfully with the rest of the Division from Southampton on June 11 1944. From a concentration area north-west of Fresnay Le Crotteur the Battalion entered the line on June 15, relieving the I /4th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry north of Bronay.

Sounds of demolitions on the night of June 15/16 indicated that the Germans were evacuating Bronay. A platoon from "A" Company, supported by artillery and mortars, staged a small diversion while the K.O.Y.L.I. attacked to the southwest and took Cristot, two miles away. Early in the afternoon of June 16 the Fusiliers advanced into Bronay, to find it deserted by the enemy, except for snipers and booby traps. The most original decoy was an egg, a luxury scarce at that time. The Battalion took up a defensive position south of Bronay, where it remained, subjected to heavy mortar fire, until detailed for "Operation Martlet".

11th BATTALION: *Fontenay-le-Pesnel*

"Operation Martlet" was the first stage in a major operation to gain command of the southern exits of Caen, in which the Division was to attack Rauray, which stood on high ground beyond the Caen-Fontenay road. The 49th Division was to form a firm base through which the 15th (Scottish) Division could pass to continue the attack. The main objective was the capture of Rauray on June 25, in order to protect the right flank of VIII Corp's advance next day.

In the first phase of a three-phase attack by the 147th Brigade, the 11th Scots Fusiliers were to take Fontenay-le-Pesnel. Another Battalion was to follow and capture St. Nicolas Fe in the second phase; and in the third phase the Fusiliers were to capture Rauray. In this attack the Battalion was to be supported by: a squadron of tanks; several field regiments and an Army Group of Royal Artillery; two platoons of 42-inch mortars; two platoons of medium machine guns; and to have under command three troops of anti-tank guns and one field company of Royal Engineers. The Fusiliers' general plan for phase one was to attack with "B" Company on the right, with an assault section of pioneers and a section of carriers under command; and with "C" Company on the left, supported by a troop of tanks in addition to pioneers and carriers. "A" and "D" Companies were to be in reserve.

At 4.15 a.m. on June 25 the attack was launched. An official account of it says:

“The artillery preparation was immense, but the 12th Special Service Panzer Division was not long in replying, bringing down all the weight of its guns as the leading companies pressed forward. They went forward under a barrage as planned. The dust thrown up was caught in the mist clinging to the low ground in front of Fontenay-le-Pesnel. This mixture, combined with smoke put down by the enemy, completely obscured vision for the first three hours of operations. Visibility was confined to one or two yards and had disastrous results, causing company commanders on passing the start line to lose control of their men. To make matters worse, the blast from the barrage broke all the valves in the portable wireless sets. The situation was so confused that the forward companies consisted largely of odd groups of men groping their way in twos and threes without the slightest idea of direction. Some 60 or 70 of them lost direction to such an extent that they ultimately joined forces with the 1st Hallams far to the right of where they ought to have been.

“German and British became hopelessly entangled in the fog; there was fierce hand-to-hand fighting. All this time the Fusiliers were being subjected to heavy artillery, mortar and spandau fire from the front and the left flank. Casualties were heavy. ‘A’ and ‘D’ Companies were called forward at about 8.15 a.m. and as many officers and men of other companies as could be collected in the haze were sent forward with them. Enemy fire was still intense and casualties continued to be heavy. The Commanding Officer was forward with the Intelligence Officer (Captain Leslie) and personally supervised the attack, inspiring all ranks with his leadership and personal courage. At the Tilly-Caen road the fighting was particularly severe. At approximately 10 a.m. the Commanding Officer reported that the attacking troops numbered approximately one company, and an hour later about 70 men were left.

“Nevertheless, by noon ‘D’ Company had established a firm foothold on the Calvary at the west end of Fontenay-le-Pesnel, and ‘A’ Company was in part of a building. House-to-house fighting was bitter. A small force of about 40 stragglers commanded by Major Gardiner (Officer Commanding Support Company) arrived, cleared a triangle of roads and an orchard to the north-west, and joined up with ‘A’ and ‘D’ Companies. By 3 p.m. the Fusiliers were consolidated in the area but unable to move further because of lack of numbers, the opposition mostly coming from snipers and machine-gunners in fortified

houses. Another Battalion, however, successfully attacked the remainder of the objective from the right flank, joined up with the Fusiliers, and went on to take St. Nicholas Fe, meeting little opposition, the enemy now having largely withdrawn. Mortaring and shelling were exceedingly heavy but the Fusiliers managed to dig in. The 6-pounders came up to deal with German tanks looming up in the mist.

“For ferocity of fighting, the savageness of the enemy and the intensity of artillery of both sides, this battle will ever be remembered by those who fought in it.”

The Battalion’s casualties were heavy, totalling 7 officers and 194 other ranks. Reinforcements, largely from English units, filled up the ranks, and the preponderance of Scotsmen in the Battalion thereafter was considerably reduced.

After their attack on Fontenay-le-Pesnel the 11th Battalion moved westwards on June 28, and arriving north of Juvigny took up positions on the right flank of the 49th Division. The Division now held Le Manoir and a wood on commanding ground at Tessel to the west of it. On its left the 8th Canadian Brigade had taken La Byude and Marcelet. The 29th Armoured Brigade had now

gone ahead of the 15th Division, crossing the Odon by a bridge near Tournauville, and had deployed on rising ground where it was meeting increased resistance.

From June 28 to July 7 the Fusiliers' work consisted of offensive patrolling and improvement of their defences by means of extensive wiring operations during the night. July 3 was an unhappy day for the Battalion as the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Montgomery-Cunninghame, D.S.O., was killed. Medium artillery had registered on enemy targets in front of "C" Company, and to enable this to be done the company had withdrawn slightly. Unfortunately registration was carried out before "C" Company had time to dig new positions, and when the enemy artillery replied with heavy fire the whole company was caught lying in the open. The Commanding Officer was talking to Major Caunt, the Company Commander, when he was hit by a mortar splinter in the left shoulder and chest, and died within half an hour. The Colonel had been an original member of the 11th Battalion and was deservedly popular with all ranks under his command. The drive and leadership which he had shown during the training period were even more pronounced in action, and his fearless courage was an inspiration to the whole Battalion. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel D. A. D. Eykyn, formerly Second-in-Command of the 8th Royal Scots, which was fighting at that time alongside the 6th Scots Fusiliers in the 44th Brigade of the 15th Division.

An important change at about this time was the replacement of one of the 147th Brigade's Battalions by the 1st Battalion of the Royal Leicestershire Regiment. The Leicesters were old friends of the Scots Fusiliers from their days together in Norfolk. Between July 8 and 25 the Fusiliers had spells in the line at Rauray; at Cuverville, near Caen; in the Benouville sector; and in rest areas at Ducy St. Marguerite and Chouain. By the end of July they were in a defensive position south-east of Caen at Frenouville, where they remained until August 9. They also carried out highly successful patrols against poorly-trained German troops which had been hastily brought up to stop gaps in the enemy line.

11th Battalion: *Vimont*

Vire had now fallen to the Americans, and Mont Pincon to the 43rd Division. "At Mont Pincon", says Chester Wilmot, "the Germans had put in a wedge to stop their defensive door from opening any further but that wedge was gone. The door began to creak and the time had come for the Canadians on the Caen-Falaise road to strike at the hinge." It was thought likely that if the 1st Canadian Army, consisting of the II Canadian and I British Corps, could reach Falaise, the final rout of the Germans in Normandy would follow. The advance on Falaise was to be known as "Operation Totalize".

On August 10 the 11th Scots Fusiliers, as a unit of the 49th Division which was now with I Corps, moved southeastwards to attempt the capture of Vimont, a village almost due north of Falaise, as part of "Operation Totalize". Vimont was situated at a road junction, in orchard country. Through it flowed a tributary of the River Muance; and to the south of it, running in a south-easterly direction, was the main railway line from Caen. In the first phase of the assault the Battalion had under command one squadron of tanks, a troop of 17-pounder anti-tank guns and a platoon of machine guns; and in the second phase a platoon of Royal Engineers.

During the first phase anti-tank mines laid alongside the railway immobilised six tanks and blew a track off one of the Battalion carriers. At 6.40 a.m., with "C" Company on the right and "B" on the left, the Fusiliers began their advance in the second phase. The companies soon came under heavy artillery and machine gun fire. "By 9 a.m.", an account states, "both leading companies were holding ground on the far side of the Muance and were on their objective. The reserve companies, however, were not committed because of the heavy shell fire. Within the objective were a large number of machine guns admirably sited by the enemy, which prevented consolidation as it was found impossible to dislodge them. The tank commander said he could not take on the job, and a similar reply was given by the commander of the 'Crocodiles' (flame throwing tanks) who had been hastily summoned. Accordingly, after a conference, the Brigade Commander decided to withdraw the Fusiliers to a line which could be firmly held at Bellengravier." This relatively small action cost the Fusiliers several casualties, killed and wounded.

On the night of August 12/13 the 1st Leicesters took over from the Fusiliers, who returned to Frenouville. From there companies were able to go one at a time for a day by the sea at Lucy-sur-Mer. On August 15 the Fusiliers returned to Vimont, and moved forward through the Leicesters to Moulton. Surprisingly, although Moulton was on dominating ground which gave good observation over the whole surrounding area, it was found clear of the enemy, and the place was held until the other Battalions of the Brigade, the 7th Duke of Wellington's and the 1st Leicesters, had passed through. Meanwhile the Canadians had entered Falaise on August 16. The Fusiliers remained at Moulton until August 19, when they moved in transport eastwards to Mezidon, to relieve the 11th Durham Light Infantry. This marked the beginning of the advance to the Seine, a period of much increased mobility for the Battalion.

11th Battalion: *The pursuit to the Seine*

The pursuit of the Germans to the Seine began. A contemporary account says:

"The Fusiliers rode on trucks, tanks, and captured vehicles, through St. Plait, Dumont, Baignard, Ouilley-Le-Victome, Lieurey, St. Martin, Appeville, and across the Touque and the Risle. Opposition was light, although from time to time the Germans tried to make a stand. We took toll of the enemy in prisoners and killed, and suffered some casualties ourselves. For an attack on Ouilley-Le-Victome on August 22 the whole Brigade was deployed. Our task was to gain a crossing of the Touque. 'B' and 'C' Companies led. We took more than 20 prisoners for the loss of two killed and three wounded. The Divisional Commander called at Battalion Headquarters and congratulated us on our performance.

"After crossing the River La Vie Morte the welcome extended by the population became progressively warmer, reaching its climax at Pont-de-la-Racque on August 28 in a riot of flowers, fruit and wine. Next came the Seine crossing, which we made in the wake of our victorious armies. In an assortment of captured vehicles, which frequently broke down, we made a trip of 150 miles to reach Grandchamp, 15 miles as the crow flies. We were held up for 12 hours by a broken bridge, while hosts of children pestered us for '*cigarettes pour papa*'. Eventually we crossed the Seine at Elboeuf on September 4."

For fourteen consecutive days the Battalion had been constantly on the move by night and day, and the Fusiliers had rarely slept for more than two hours at a time. They had waded across three rivers, all by night, and during the period had taken about 120 prisoners.

11th Battalion: *Le Havre*

During September, while the bulk of the Allied armies were moving towards the German frontiers the First Canadian Army, to which the 49th Division then belonged, was engaged in the reduction of the Channel fortresses from Le Havre, Boulogne and Calais to Dunkirk, and in the clearance of the southern shore of the Scheldt Estuary. This was the last

stronghold of the German Fifteenth Army, separated by an ever increasing distance from its neighbour, the Seventh Army, and slowly disintegrating. The Canadians were extended along the coast, engaged in assaulting each garrison individually. The defences of the Channel ports, almost impregnable from the sea, were vulnerable on the landward side.

The 49th and another British division reduced Le Havre on September 12, after 48 hours' fighting. From September 5 to 10 the 11th Scots Fusiliers were in position facing Le Havre from the south-east, in view of the enemy. For four successive nights patrols reconnoitred the crossings of the River Lelarde, but no routes were found, except one through the village of Montevilliers. All other roads and bridges had been damaged by the Germans and the surrounding areas flooded. Patrols encountered no enemy and the situation was quiet; only two mortar bombs fell in the course of four days and nights. On two consecutive days the Royal Air Force bombed Le Havre continuously in a series of attacks each lasting two hours. The land attack on the port went in on the evening of September 10. Many of the roads had been rendered dangerous by the Germans' extensive use of glass mines, which were hard to detect; therefore the minimum number of vehicles was taken forward. The only comment in the Battalion records is that the operation was an absolute success and that few casualties were suffered. In all, some 600 prisoners were taken, about half by "B" Company alone. Major Charnock, the Company Commander, and Lieutenant Dunlop were wounded.

The enemy made only token resistance at both Boulogne and Calais. The clearance of these ports was completed by October 1, but so badly damaged were the dock installations that a month elapsed before the ports were of any practical value. After the Le Havre operation the 11th Scots Fusiliers returned to Le Mesnil and then to Bolbec to reorganise, before moving after a few days to an area east of Dieppe to receive reinforcements.

11th Battalion: *Into Belgium*

From Dieppe the Battalion moved northwards, crossed the Belgian frontier and passed through Tournai and Brussels. It established itself by last light on September 24 on the bank of the Turnhout-Antwerp Canal. Next day "D" Company was ordered at very short notice to cross the canal in order to create a diversion while 146 Brigade established a bridgehead on the left. A Spandau covering the site of the crossing took heavy toll of the men in the leading boat before the German weapon was knocked out by a Piat. "D" and "B" Companies then established a

bridgehead to a depth of 500 yards, with “A” Company in reserve, but were later withdrawn to the area of the crossing. On September 26 the companies came under heavy fire from 20-millimetre guns and machine guns, and at about mid-day they were withdrawn across the canal. In the evening the enemy launched an attack against the positions vacated by the Fusiliers, which indicated that the diversionary operation had been successful.

The 49th Division made its main thrust further to the east. To hold the line of the canal an independent group, named “Eykyntforce “, was created, consisting of the Scots Fusiliers, with anti-tank guns, Royal Engineers, machine guns, heavy mortars, a carrier platoon of the Duke of Wellington’s Regiment and elements of the Belgian White Brigade and Partisan Army. By October 1 Eykyntforce was in position, forming a protective bridgehead. They were ordered to extend the bridgehead and accordingly moved forward, divided into four battle patrols, but encountered no opposition. On October 2 the force was relieved of its role and disbanded, and its units restored to divisional command. The exploitation of the victory won in Normandy was now complete. The thrust at the Rhineland, “Operation Market Garden “, had been postponed in favour of an advance on a broader front. The more immediate objectives were: first, the opening up of the Scheldt, in order to free Antwerp and thus alleviate the supply problems of the Allied march eastward; and secondly the reinforcement of the Nijmegen bridgehead, with a view to driving the Germans from the line of the River Maas.

Chapter XIII

ANTWERP TO THE MAAS— 4/5th and 6th Bn's—1944

4/5th Battalion: Introduction—A week in France 1940 —Training at home, 1940—1944— The Scheldt—Walcheren

6th Bn: Tilburg—The Deurne Canal—Blerick

4/5th Battalion: Introduction

THE 4th and 5th Territorial Army Battalions of the Scots Fusiliers were amalgamated in 1923 to form the 4/5th Battalion, at that time the only Territorial unit of the Regiment.

On the outbreak of war in September 1939 the Battalion was embodied and stationed at Stevenston, where it carried out guard duties at the explosive factories at Ardeer as part of its preparation for active service. Training continued throughout the first half of 1940, first at Stobs Camp in Roxburghshire, and then at Lyme Regis in Dorset. The 52nd (Lowland) Division, to which the Battalion belonged, was soon to be sent overseas. The divisional commander was Major-General Drew. The three brigades of the Division were the 155th, the 156th and the 157th, the three Battalions of the 156th being the 4/5th Scots Fusiliers and the 6th and 7th Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) under command of Brigadier J. S. N. Fitzgerald, M.B.E., M.C., of the Irish Guards. The Scots Fusiliers were commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel T. Laurie, with

Major R. S. McNaught as Second-in-Command, Captain Rait-Smith as Adjutant, Lieutenant Reed as Intelligence Officer and Lieutenant Woods as Quartermaster. During the period of training before the Battalion went to France, Major A. N. Gosselin (later Brigadier and Honorary Colonel of the Battalion), who was eventually to command the 4/5th in the invasion of North West Europe, arrived from the 1st Battalion in India to take over the appointment of Second-in-Command; Lieutenant Mullineaux became Quartermaster; and Regimental Sergeant Major Maule succeeded Regimental Sergeant-Major Greatrix.

4/5th BATTALION: A week in France, 1940

On June 12 1940, after an inspection of the 52nd Division by His Majesty the King at Thursley near Aldershot, the 156th Brigade embarked at Plymouth for France, eight days after the last of the “little ships” had brought the remnants of the British Expeditionary Force back from Dunkirk. The 157th Brigade, which was involved in heavy fighting before it was finally extricated, had gone on ahead; the 155th was to follow. All were reinforcements to sustain the defence of France. The 51st Division had been lost on June 9, and the remaining British formations under French command were attempting to form a bridgehead across the base of the Brittany peninsula.

For four days after landing in France the 4/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers remained in an orchard near the village of Soujet. On June 15 the British War Cabinet, convinced of the hopelessness of the situation, ordered the remaining British forces, which were under direction of the French Tenth Army, to begin withdrawal. On June 16 the 52nd Division, with the exception of the 157th Brigade, began to move to the coast; and the Scots Fusiliers travelled by road without interference to a destination 12 miles from Cherbourg. There the Battalion remained concealed in a wood for 24 hours, during which all its equipment and transport except the carriers were systematically destroyed. On the evening of the next day, without any definite news except of the fall of Paris, and without knowledge of the movements of Allied or enemy troops, the Battalion arrived at the port of Cherbourg. There was considerable confusion at the harbour, but the first 30 men of the long column managed to embark in a steamer, which proved to be the last to sail on that day. The rest of the Battalion embarked next day. Four years were to pass before the 4/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers, or any other unit of the 52nd Division, reappeared in North West Europe.

4/5th BATTALION: Training at home, 1940—1944

On arrival in England the Battalion moved to Cambridge, and subsequently went into tents and bivouacs at Pampisford, 9 miles away from the town, where the process of reorganisation and reconditioning began. Colonel Laurie relinquished command and was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel H. A. Holme, who was in turn succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel E. Hakewill Smith, M.C. (now Major-General Hakewill Smith, C.B.E., M.C.), who later commanded the 52nd Division and subsequently became Colonel of the Regiment. At the same time Lieutenant McKenzie was appointed Adjutant. By this time the Battalion had moved to Kennet Hall, near Newmarket, where the remaining summer months of 1940 were spent in exercises and preparations to defeat invasion, and in a general raising of military standards. Then came a short spell in billets at Wymondham, near Norwich, before the 4/5th Battalion returned in the autumn

to Scotland, where it relieved the 2nd Bn in Callander. Lieutenant-Colonel Hakewill Smith having been promoted to command the 157th Brigade, the next Commanding Officer of the Battalion was Lieutenant-Colonel (now Major-General Sir) K. W. D. Strong, who subsequently became General Eisenhower's Chief Intelligence Officer. He was succeeded in March 1942 by Lieutenant-Colonel A. N. Gosselin.

The equipment and training of the 52nd Division as a Mountain Division, which followed, was largely exploratory and experimental. The Cairngorm hills provided natural advantages and easy access, and in the ensuing years the Scots Fusiliers found themselves stationed successively in the towns of Callander, Crieff, Banchory, Keith, and Crieff again. The mountain training, with pack animals and special equipment was gradual and progressive. Unit exercises lasted three or four days and divisional exercises, of which the most important were called "Goliath I" and "Goliath II" extended over much longer periods. Major J. H. Dudgeon, M.C., of the Royal Scots Greys, who was in charge of all animals, and his instructors gave riding lessons to officers in the evenings. At first the Battalion marched over the hills followed by about 100 heavily laden animals, but this cavalcade proved cumbersome and impractical and the packs soon came off the animals and went on to the men.

In the autumn of 1942 Major-General Ritchie, who had taken over command of the Division, paid his first visit to the Fusiliers and decided to test the distance that a Battalion could move across the hills under the full mountain load, which varied between 30 and 60 pounds per man carried in and on a Bergen rucksack. The Battalion covered 32 miles in 31 hours, nearly all through waist-deep heather, under the specified operational weight. Despite this endurance test one Fusilier left to play for Aberdeen Football Club and about 50 Fusiliers went straight to a local dance immediately after the exercise.

Two years were spent in mountain warfare training. The first of the "Goliath" exercises took place in the Loch Ness area and lasted three weeks, during which it rained every day. The second, during which the Scots Fusiliers were temporarily commanded by Major A. I. Buchanan-Dunlop, the Second-in-Command, was staged about Loch Tay, Perth and Stirling, and lasted over a fortnight. Towards the end of 1943 the Battalion returned from Keith, which had been its base during the second "Goliath" exercise, to Crieff, where it was billeted in the Hydropathic Hotel; while the 6th Cameronians were in the lower town and the 7th at Comrie. A guard of honour was provided by the Fusiliers for General Eisenhower when he visited the Division in Perthshire during this period. The Divisional Commander was now Major-General Hakewill Smith, promoted to succeed General Ritchie, who had departed to assume command of XII Corps. Major Buchanan-Dunlop left at about the same time to assume command of the 6th Cameronians. During its time in Crieff the 4/5th Battalion was frequently visited by its Honorary Colonel, Major-General E. A. Beck, C.B.E., D.S.O., a Scots Fusilier who had served with distinction in the Regiment in the South African War and the first World War.

The Division was then trained in Combined operations at Inverary, and in the summer of 1944, when the invasion of France had begun, it left Scotland for Dropmore, near Maidenhead, whence it soon moved to Welbeck Abbey. At this period the Battalion was training in an air-transportable role, to follow up airborne landings on the continent. This had involved a formidable task of reorganisation and re-equipment, with new routines and drills to be mastered, and the construction of mock-up aircraft for training and rehearsals. The Division was first prepared for an airborne operation on the Allied right flank in Brittany, and next, when that plan

was abandoned, for the follow-up at Arnhem. The Fusiliers had been briefed and were standing by their aircraft when their part in the Arnhem operation was cancelled because of the decision to proceed no further with that whole enterprise.

Finally, on October 12 and 13 1944, after concentrating in a transit camp at Fareham in Hampshire, the main body of the Division crossed the Channel, not by air but by sea to Ostend. Bad weather delayed the tank landing ships carrying the vehicles, and the Scots Fusiliers were billeted in the little Belgian village of Deinze, near Ghent, until the unit was completely assembled and the ,56th Brigade gradually concentrated.

4/5th BATTALION: *The Scheldt*

The 52nd (Lowland) Division was ordered to dislodge the Germans from the northern defences of the Scheldt on the island of South Beveland and Walcheren. For this purpose the Scots Fusiliers moved in motor transport to the town of Sluiskil in Holland, where they were billeted in a factory. Plans had been made for an assault landing on South Beveland, an operation entailing a sea trip in “buffaloes” (amphibious troop carriers) across the Scheldt estuary from the port of Terneuzen, a distance of nearly five miles. Only 24 hours were available for preparation and to become acquainted with the unfamiliar “buffaloes”, and the morning was spent with the Commanding Officer of the Amphibious Regiment gaining experience of the craft and calculating lifts for men and transport. Colonel Gosselin later wrote: “It was rather ironic that we spent over three years at the highest possible altitudes training as mountain troops and yet our first action was below sea-level, and we never got higher than 30 metres in any of our operations.”

The two-Battalion fleet for the invasion of South Beveland, with the Scots Fusiliers sailing on the right and the 6th Cameronians further south on the left, set out from the Dutch mainland in the early hours of October 26. The Battalion plan was to put “A”, “B” and “D” Companies ashore in the first wave. The task of “B” and “D” Companies was to silence the small arms fire of the Germans holding coastal defences, while “A” Company, remaining in the amphibious craft, pushed inland to seize the village of Moltenberg. “C” Company was to follow during the night and make straight for positions two and a half miles inshore, while Battalion Headquarters, with the transport and gunner observers, was to beach at about the same time. A tremendous weight of artillery, provided by the 9th A.G.R.A. (Army Group Royal Artillery), consisting of one field, four medium and two heavy regiments, sited in gun positions on the mainland and controlled by observers with Battalion Headquarters and the forward companies, was to support the assault. Colonel Gosselin was to co-ordinate the attack of the two Battalions during the initial phases, in course of which the Second-in-Command, Major J. M. Lind, was to command the Fusiliers. Simultaneously, the 2nd Canadian Division was to drive straight across the isthmus westwards to the Walcheren Causeway.

The flotillas formed up under shell fire from the Dutch coast and made the crossing; but things soon began to go wrong. The “buffaloes” were unable to climb the steep “bund” (flood bank) on the South Beveland shore. Nevertheless the Fusiliers of “B” and “D” Companies swarmed ashore and began clearing the coastal defence posts without difficulty. “B” Company swung right according to plan, made progress inland and began to consolidate. From its position the company observed a pillbox 200 yards to the north from which machine guns and artillery were harassing

the craft still cruising off the beaches and waiting to be called in. The pillbox was on the sea wall, protected by floods and barbed wire and approachable only by way of two narrow causeways. Lieutenant Dempsey was ordered to take his platoon forward to deal with this strong point. He and his men cut their way through the wire and although Dempsey was twice hit by small arms fire and mortally wounded in the final charge, the post was taken and a critical phase of the landing freed from further trouble. The gun fire directed on the assault craft still out at sea was steady and accurate, and the whole force was not ashore before first light. By six o'clock, however, the last of the "buffaloes" had landed.

Meanwhile three of the "buffaloes" containing "A" Company had been coaxed over the bund. One platoon, Lieutenant Ramsay's, had strayed and eventually beached with the 6th Cameronians, but the remaining platoons, packed tight in their vehicles, moved on unopposed in the dawn until they found their way to a level crossing north-west of the village of Baarland. There they surprised a German anti-tank gun, which fired two shots at a range of 15 yards but fortunately missed its targets. The "buffaloes" were so packed with troops that the ramps could not be lowered in the face of the enemy, until Corporal Allan flung himself out and dominated the German gun crew with a Sten gun. The corporal was followed by Major Crawford and the rest of the company, which cleared the obstacle and promptly dug in.

Reviewed in daylight, the results of the landing were so far not unsatisfactory. "B" Company was in position, while "A" Company was also on its objective but unable to stay there, having been weakened by the loss of Ramsay's platoon. "D" Company was over the bund and dealing with the village of Bakendorp. "C" Company was not so well situated. Its own craft were lost, and the craft carrying its gunner observer had been irretrievably damaged and abandoned. The gunner mounted his salvaged wireless set on the bund and went forward on foot with a portable set, but this makeshift means of communication led later to difficulties. The beachhead after dawn was not a reassuring sight. "Buffaloes" were stalling and sliding back down the face of the steep bund; some were scrambling over and others discharging their loads on the waterline, where enemy mortars, previously ranged on the beach, were dropping their bombs. Battalion Headquarters, without waiting to assemble completely, moved off towards Bakendorp, which was its final location. The Commanding Officer (Major Lind) mounted in the leading "weasel" (an amphibious carrier) was shot at by snipers from houses in the village. Headquarters was therefore established outside Bakendorp in some very wet ditches, while "D" Company and the dismounted carrier platoon set about clearing the village. During the morning Colonel Gosselin was wounded, and with his batman, Lance-Corporal Sherrard, was evacuated to a hospital in Antwerp (whence to the surprise and delight of all ranks he contrived to rejoin the Battalion a fortnight later). His craft on nearing the shore had taken a direct hit from an armour-piercing shell and burst into flames, and the Colonel and others were badly burned and thrown into the sea. Despite these and other mishaps, however, some organisation was soon achieved in the beachhead, for which much of the credit went to the unit landing officer, Captain Dallas, and to the commander of the medical section, Captain Innes, who devotedly attended the wounded despite a mortar burst almost in the middle of his collecting post.

The attack began to develop. "C" Company was directed forward to exploit success before the Germans could recover from their initial surprise. At 10 a.m. the company reached "A" Company's locality in a railway station beyond Baarland, and Lieutenant Currie's platoon was temporarily detached to assist "A" Company in eradicating troublesome snipers in some

buildings 400 yards from the position. The remainder of "C" Company made their way along the railway track through orchards and close country, meeting intermittent small arms fire, until they reached the fringes of Molenburg, a small hamlet in which the Germans had recovered sufficiently to organise determined resistance. Major Cumes deployed his reduced company for attack without help of the artillery. The loss of the more powerful wireless set was now felt, as the portable set was out of range. The Germans began to envelop the isolated company. As the afternoon was now advanced, Major Cumes began to withdraw with the intention of consolidating for the night, but the operation cost casualties from mortar fire. When darkness fell, a large detachment of Germans, using guns and mortars, pressed "C" Company back towards "A" Company's position. The two companies then dug in, with one post no further than the width of the railway from the enemy.

Battalion Headquarters at Bakendorp also had trouble with its communications about mid-afternoon, owing to the disappearance of the "weasel" containing the spare wireless batteries. Attempts to improve the situation by running lines to each company were made under searching fire from mortars and snipers, and all but one of the companies were finally linked up on their objectives notwithstanding the confusion at the bunds. "D" Company was in a position astride a road, 500 yards south-west of "A" Company at the railway station, where it was entrenched but harassed by shell fire; "C" Company's whereabouts remained unknown. Support Company, except for detachments of specialists performing various tasks forward, had not been involved. The enemy mortars had by now been silenced by the artillery fire of the A.G.R.A.

At nightfall on October 26 the Brigade Commander, Brigadier C. N. Barclay, D.S.O., ordered the Battalion to hold its present positions, but to send a detachment back along the railway to a crossing 1,500 yards west of "A" Company's position in preparation for a dawn attack by the remaining Battalion of the 156th Brigade, the 7th Cameronians. In the absence of "C" Company the only reserve for this purpose consisted of those individuals who had arrived late in the build-up, 27 in number. They were organised into a platoon under Lieutenant Ogaard of the Norwegian Army, attached to the Fusiliers and serving as sniper officer. They were not, however, committed at that stage, as news came at last that "C" Company was safely in position beside "A" in what was proving to be a hot corner of the battlefield. "C" Company was then ordered to advance to the crossing with the platoon commanded by Lieutenant Ogaard, which was to occupy a position there. The missing platoon of "A" Company, led by Lieutenant Ramsay, appeared at about the same time. It had landed on the 6th Cameronians' beach at a critical hour when the Cameronians were short of men for an attack on the village of Oudelande, and had displayed great dash and spirit.

After midnight "C" Company started for the crossing, but was halted by fierce small arms fire from a German infantry company. Ogaard and his platoon slipped away to the flank and across country to the objective. They had a punishing run, as they were detected, engaged with mortars and small arms by the Germans, losing two men killed and three wounded, and the platoon was thrown into disorder. The bulk, however, got to the crossroads, where they dug themselves in and discouraged any counter-attack by spraying Bren gun fire round the position for the rest of the night. Unfortunately one of the casualties was Ogaard's signaller with the wireless set, and the advantages of this valuable action were lost because news of its success could not be passed back. In the morning the 7th Cameronians were directed westwards instead of to the north, and the crossing was later taken over by the 5th Highland Light Infantry of the 157th Brigade. The H.L.I.

went on to take Molenburg, "C" Company's original objective. "C" Company spent an exhausting night. Like the rest of the Battalion on that wide front, it had suffered from infiltrations and from snipers who were apparently in league with collaborators amongst the local population, in whose houses they sheltered at night; it was not until the Fusiliers got among the houses and evacuated all civilians that this nuisance ceased. The company was given mortar support in the morning and took about 100 prisoners. The Scots Fusiliers mortar platoon also took part in the artillery concentration which preceded the entry of the H.L.I. into Molenburg.

That afternoon at about the time Molenburg fell "B" Company was facing a determined and aggressive German force in the town of Hoedekenskerke, which was protected by floodwater and accessible only by two fire-swept causeways, on one of which Lieutenant Dempsey had already lost his life. The German force attacked but was met resolutely, driven to cover by mortar and rifle fire and finally almost exterminated by retaliation from the A.G.R.A.

Next day, October 28, the 157th Brigade arrived in strength, and the 6th and 7th Cameronians made good progress. "C" Company of the Scots Fusiliers was withdrawn and the Support Company concentrated. Battalion Headquarters moved further down the road, as it had become a target for 88-millimetre guns, one shell from which killed two men. The Fusiliers provided protection on the east flank while the 157th Brigade exploited northwards and the 7th Cameronians to the west. At the same time the Fusiliers were ordered to prepare an attack on Hoedekenskerke for the following day, October 29. A comprehensive plan was made that night, including a detailed fire-plan to support "B" and "C" Companies in the phased task of clearing their allotted quarters of the village. Meanwhile the 2nd Canadian Division, which had encountered difficulties from flooding and minefields in the isthmus, had forced the Transvuse Canal and was expected to join forces soon with the 52nd Division.

It was as well that the Fusiliers had completed their plan of attack on Hoedekenskerke, as they were roused by the arrival of orders for an immediate attack to be made that night. It was suspected that the Germans were beginning to withdraw. A quick decision, therefore, had to be made whether to carry out the pre-arranged plan, which included a heavy concentration from the A.G.R.A., or to gain surprise by a silent attack. The original plan was chosen in view of the risk that a small but determined garrison, with machine guns, might be covering the approaches and holding the prepared defences along the sea wall. Seven minutes of intense bombardment preceded the attack at 5.30 a.m., in which a platoon of 42-inch mortars and the Battalion's own 3-inch mortars joined with all the available artillery. The big mortars engaged targets in the dry areas on the flanks of the objective, while the smaller put down high explosive and smoke in front.

The German defence of South Beveland completely collapsed. Some of the enemy literally cast away their weapons and fled to Walcheren. When the Fusiliers entered Hoedekenskerke only 20 or 30 Germans could be found. The inhabitants were in a pitiable condition; Lieutenant Davies, the Intelligence Officer, Sergeant Marie, the Battalion's Dutch Liaison Officer, and Captain Innes, the Medical Officer, together took stock of their ills and looked after them. "B" and "C" Companies passed through the town and made contact a short way beyond with reconnaissance elements of the 2nd Canadian Division. The only brush with the retreating enemy occurred in the afternoon, as the Fusiliers were advancing northwards into the area of Kwadendamme, when Lieutenant Ogaard and his snipers exchanged shots with a party of Germans.

This concluded the operations in South Beveland. The Battalion spent that night in the block of houses which had caused so much concern to "A" Company.

4/5th BATTALION: *Walcheren*

During this period the Canadians and the 157th Brigade had been sweeping forward, the latter moving north-westwards up the coast. Both were converging on the mile-long causeway connecting South Beveland with Walcheren, which carried a railway and a highway at a level raised above the height of the spring floods. The Canadians crossed the causeway and secured an adequate but hard won bridgehead. Into this bridgehead it was proposed to send the 157th Brigade, which was then to deploy outwards to the south-west. The German garrison of Walcheren, reinforced by units which had escaped from South Beveland, mounted a heavy and skilful counterattack which threw the Canadians back to the extreme western edge of the causeway and made even this foothold barely tenable. At this point it was decided to withdraw the Canadians and entrust the capture of Walcheren to the 52nd Division. Accordingly the Glasgow Highlanders took over the Canadian foothold on the causeway, where they too were firmly held by the enemy. Several times during this bitter engagement the Fusiliers were under orders to move up to the battle area, but on each occasion those orders were cancelled or postponed.

The island of Walcheren resembled a flat-bottomed dish. Its edges were formed by natural dunes and a series of dykes protecting the polder farmland, which lay below sea-level, from the incursions of the North Sea. It had been decided to flood Walcheren in order to prevent enemy movements on the roads - and to isolate their fortresses on the dunes. Lancaster bombers of the Royal Air Force successfully breached the dykes at Westkapelle on the north-west cape of the island, and by mid-October the greater part of the land surface was submerged. The garrison of some 8,000 Germans was thus confined to the southern port of Flushing, to the town of Middelburg, and to three strips of land on the coastline. On the first day of November the 155th Brigade of the 52nd Division, with No. 4 Commando, crossed from Breskens to Flushing, and by the middle of the morning half of the town had been occupied. Simultaneously, a naval task force bombarded the coastal defences at Westkapelle, but made little impression; while a support squadron consisting of 25 landing craft equipped with rockets and artillery moved in to fire at closer range, but was repulsed. This attack, however, diverted notice from a further attempt, which proved successful. Commandoes of the 4th Special Service Brigade sailed through the gap in the Westkapelle dykes in "buffaloes", entered Westkapelle village from the east and overran the main coastal batteries. On the eastern side of the island, however, the enemy still stoutly denied access into the causeway hinterland to the 52nd Division. The Divisional Commander, Major-General Hakewill Smith, was in command of all land forces, including a number of commando units. On November 2 the Scots Fusiliers left Kwadendamme and reached Nieudorp. It had been assumed that the 157th Brigade would have left this village when it moved forward to the causeway; but in fact it did not leave until two days later, and there was considerable overcrowding as a result.

The interval of waiting at Nieudorp before re-entry to the battle was marked for the Scots Fusiliers by an awkward accident of war. For want of a better place, Battalion Headquarters was established in a small house at the north end of the village, not far removed from a large school

building in which the Royal Engineers had gathered men and equipment in readiness to follow the 157th Brigade over the causeway. Artillery duels between Allied and German guns across the narrow strait kept the fighting alive during the brief stalemate. The favourite German weapon was a biggish gun, or outsize mortar, a shell from which struck the village school and detonated a lorry-load of explosive "beehives" amongst the engineers' stores. The detonation rocked the whole village, blew out windows and brought down tiles. Soon the entire structure was ablaze. Two other lorries laden with "beehives" were in the burning school. The Battalion's signals equipment and stores and the Brigade wireless set were on the fringe of the danger area and every effort was made to get them away. "It was an extraordinary sight", says one eye-witness. "Figures were hurrying to and fro in the red glare of the great fire, men frantically salvaging equipment, straining to pull out heavy trailers and attempting to start up the jeeps. A tremendous racket went on all the while as the small arms ammunition exploded." The loads of "beehives" exploded at 20-minute intervals, but the equipment was salvaged. For some reason the Germans refrained from further shelling of what must have been a very attractive target. But the carrier platoon of the Fusiliers, which was guarding the headquarters area, was unlucky. Some of the men were sleeping in the end of the school buildings when the original shell landed; five were killed and two, including Sergeant Lee, wounded.

On the night of November 4 the 6th Cameronians began out-flanking the defences which were containing the bridgehead over the Walcheren causeway. From South Beveland they made a crossing of the River Sloe in assault boats more than a mile below the causeway. The estuary at this point is a stretch of tidal water 200 yards wide, and on the far side are treacherous mud flats and saltings, which were sown with mines. During this successful and gallant action of the Cameronians, the Scots Fusiliers provided portage. In the course of the operations, when a boat was struck by a mortar bomb, Sergeant Gilmour lost a leg and two Fusiliers were drowned. Next day the Battalion performed the same tasks for the 5th Highland Light Infantry when they were ferried over. The 157th Brigade Commander subsequently wrote to the effect that the success of the whole operation turned largely on the unremitting help rendered by the 4/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers. Now outflanked from the south, the Germans had to relax their pressure at the causeway and the 52nd Division began to cross it in strength. Naval vessels, which were already sweeping the estuary, joined with the A.G.R.A., now in South Beveland, in a continuous bombardment which shook the houses of Nieudorp and created havoc in the German lines.

On November 5 the 157th Brigade was feeling its way northwards towards the town of Middelburg, and the 7th Cameronians towards Veere. On the east coast the Scots Fusiliers were preparing to follow the Cameronians for the forcing of the Middelburg-Vere Canal. The Cameronians were taking prisoners by the hundred. The few embanked roads above the widespread floods, narrow and lined by deep ditches, were in a ruinous state; many had been cratered by the Germans, and Teller and Schu mines were profusely sown beneath the road surfaces although in some cases the enemy had lifted the mines and laid them on the verges.

As the Cameronians' transport blocked the main route, the Fusiliers went forward along the top of a narrow dyke, Un-metalled and muddy, every yard of which had to be carefully tested and swept of mines by Royal Engineers. It was midnight before the companies could assemble, complete except for a number of ditched jeeps. In pouring rain the Commanding Officer had made a personal reconnaissance of the canal. The aerial photographs which had been provided were valueless, as they were six weeks old and showed a lush countryside of neat fields and

stacked corn, whereas now this part of the island was no more than a rising lake, already four or five feet deep. The drivers of two 3-ton lorries experienced a nightmare journey in delivering a quantity of assault boats to the Cameronians, who were waiting on what was believed to be the canal bank to assemble these craft for use by the Fusiliers.

At 6 a.m. on November 6 "A" Company took to the water in its boats. There was no opposition. In the grey light of morning the objectives, 1,000 yards away, showed up in blurred outline beyond the waste of water. A bridgehead was formed on a bare embankment on the far side of the canal. "D" Company followed and carried its boats over the embankment, to embark on rougher waters which clearly belonged to the North Sea. Soon the Fusiliers were occupying positions in the lofts of barns and in the upper storeys of such houses as rose above the surrounding floods. According to the Battalion records: "Company areas were a peculiar sight. A barn door would open to admit a boatload of soldiers, shouting and singing *The Volga Boat-Song*, and close again to harbour the boat. One Fusilier was heard to enquire, as he surveyed the surrounding wastes of water from an attic window: 'When do we send out the wee dove?'"

It had been the intention to extend westwards from Veere next morning, but during the night of November 6/7 a Strong gale sprang up which had a serious effect on the operation. "D" Company and the carrier platoon could not be reached; it proved a hazardous proceeding even for a lifeboat to supply them with rations and water. In the end Captain Legget and Captain McDavid, the latter commanding the carriers, were just able to reach the marooned detachments in an iron boat rowed by three Dutch sailors. When the gale had moderated, the men were eventually brought back by "B" Company in assault boats, supplemented by three "buffaloes" which had been summoned expressly from Flushing at the insistent demand of the Brigade Commander. Another day of high winds might have had very serious consequences. Veere fell to the 7th Cameronians. The Germans were in an extremely strong position, well-entrenched and backed by artillery, but with no heart left for a fight. The 155th Brigade, having forced its way up from Flushing, aided by the 5th H.L.I. of the 157th Brigade, crossed the canal and entered Middelburg, a town of 37,000 Dutch inhabitants, many of whom cheered and waved to the British from the upper stories of their flooded homes. Thousands of surrendering Germans became inextricably mixed with the Scottish troops in streets which had become deep waterways. With the fall of Middelburg the campaign ended, except for some minor operations against pockets of German resistance in the north of the island which were accounted for by the Marine Commandoes. For the rest the task was one of clearance, tedious and at times dangerous, in which the pioneers of the Scots Fusiliers did notable work among the extensive and waterlogged minefields. Lance-Corporal Stephens of the Regimental Aid Post lost a foot in helping some mountain gunners out of a Schu minefield, and Fusilier MacIntyre was another similar casualty.

The Battalion record contains an entry written at the time, which reads as follows: "Although they (the Fusiliers) had not come up against really crack German troops nor much hard fighting, they had shown themselves steady under fire and, most important, had shown that, as a team, they were really first class. This was undoubtedly due to the long and arduous mountain training in the Highlands. It had made the men tough and able to endure hardship; it had made them self-reliant. None but a very well trained unit could have planned and executed a difficult opposed landing in such a short time."

The operations in the Scheldt Estuary cost the 4/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers one officer and 19 other ranks killed, and two officers and 70 other ranks wounded.

6th Bn: *Tilburg*

The operations on the Maas involved the 15th (Scottish) Division, which had returned to the welter of Dutch waterways from its well-earned rest at Helmond. On October 22 the 7th Armoured Division and the 53rd Division were to attack between Oss and Veghel to s'Hertogenbosch. Further south, next day, the 51st (Highland) Division was to move from Veghel through Schijndel towards Boxtel, Vucht and Esch. Still further to the south the 15th Division was to strike through Best and St. Odenrode-Boxtel towards the port of Tilburg. This was "Operation Pheasant".

The weather had improved and by dusk on October 23 the 51st Division had taken Schijndel and Olland, had crossed the Dommel between Boxtel and s'Hertogenbosch and was approaching Boxtel; while the 53rd Division was descending from the north on s'Hertogenbosch. The 5th Division found that the enemy had gone from the much disputed railway in the Best area and from Naastebest. The 44th Brigade, which had moved up from Gemert, after concentrating in great haste near the Best crossroads sent the Scots Fusiliers riding on the tanks of the Grenadiers through ditches and bogs into Oerschot, where they found the Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment, which had also reached Boxtel. At Spoordonk, about two miles beyond Oerschot, a company of the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers gave cover to a working party of Royal Engineers which was building a class-40 bridge over the Groote. The remainder of the 44th Brigade and the 227th Brigade joined the Scots Fusiliers near Oerschot. On the night of October 26 the 46th Brigade were in Oisterwijk and on the canal facing Tilburg, in position to break into the town from the east. It was the intention of the Divisional Commander to force a simultaneous entry from the south with the 44th Brigade. The Scots Fusiliers and the Royal Scots were entrusted with this task and moved up early on October 26 from Oerschot to Moergestel, before turning south to join the King's Own Scottish Borderers at a canal bridge on the road to Best and crossing the canal to enter harbour areas at Voort and Hilvarenbeek. The Fusiliers were to attack between the Wilhelmina canal and the main road from Tilburg to Hilvarenbeek across open moorland of heather, bog and scrub, which the enemy could rake with fire from natural cover. They were then to find a way along the canal towpath into the city. The K.O.S.B. were to advance straight down the Hilvarenbeek road.

At 11.15 a.m. on October 27 the Fusiliers, with "B" Company on the right and "A" Company on the left, crossed the start line and began to search the scrub near the canal. To their surprise they found there an enemy company entrenched with their backs to "B" Company and without rearward defences. This company was quickly disposed of, and shortly after mid-day all the Fusilier companies reached their objectives. Patrols probing towards the centre of Tilburg saw no signs of the enemy. The main body therefore moved on and occupied the south-eastern sector of the city, and by mid-afternoon the whole of it was taken. Lieutenant-Colonel I. Mackenzie, commanding the Fusiliers, had difficulty in making his way through cheering crowds of liberated inhabitants to pay his respects to the burgomaster. Similar successes had been achieved by the 46th and 227th Brigades. The town was split into sectors and patrolled. The Fusiliers' casualties were two killed and four wounded. October 27 was a night of great celebration. The troops were given the freedom of the city, and late the next afternoon the pipes and drums of the 6th Bn beat *Retreat* in the town square.

In an attempt to prevent a complete rout on the Scheldt, Field Marshal Von Rundstedt, using the 9th and 15th Panzer Divisions, at this stage attacked XIII Corps' eastern flank. The Germans occupied Meijel and reached Helmond, headquarters of the Second British Army. Early on the morning of October 29 the 15th Division moved rapidly out of Tilburg. The 44th Brigade, including the Scots Fusiliers, made for Deurne. They arrived there before first light to find some of the American positions overrun, with consequent danger of an enemy break-through. The rest of the Division was far behind with the 6th Tank Brigade. The 44th Brigade therefore went immediately into a close defence of Deurne, in which the Fusiliers took up a position astride the Ljesel road to meet an attack from the south. When the 227th Brigade came up it went into action at once on the Meijel-Asten road. American troops were still fighting in Ljesel.

The Deurne countryside was flat, with small farmhouses here and there, and a maze of ditches which forced wheeled and tracked transport to keep to the roads. No sooner were the Fusiliers in position at Deurne than they moved forward to Asten to allow the Americans to withdraw.

Scots Fusilier patrols sent out to Ljesel were met with German Spandau and mortar fire. But with the whole of the 15th Division now firmly established, the chance of a German coup on the Ljesel to Asten axis was greatly reduced, and the Division was able to turn to mopping-up operations in the districts about Helmond and Venlo. Ljesel was the focal point, and the Scots Fusiliers, supported by the Grenadiers, launched an attack against it on October 30 from the north-west. Every yard was a struggle to overwhelm well entrenched Germans, who had Spandaus in pillboxes covering all the approaches. Heavy British artillery concentrations and the 3-inch mortar fire of the Fusiliers, however, helped to gain the ascendancy, and by late afternoon the objective was won. The 46th Brigade came down from the north and joined the Fusiliers in repelling a counter-attack on Ljesel from the east. The Fusiliers occupied and consolidated positions in the northern half of the village.

The Germans were inside houses, Fusiliers outside; Fusiliers inside houses, Germans outside; in some houses the Fusiliers were upstairs and the Germans downstairs, shooting at each other from ranges as close as four yards. During darkness many

of the Germans filtered back and surrounded houses and buildings where platoons and sections of the Fusiliers were lodged.

Ammunition began to run low, and at about the same time could be heard the sounds made by German lorries bringing up reinforcements. The Fusiliers managed, however, to conserve enough ammunition to last until the Seaforth of the 46th Brigade entered Ljesel early that morning, when the enemy withdrew. The 6th Bn's casualties were three killed, 27 wounded and one missing.

Late in the afternoon of October 31 the Battalion moved to positions above a large wood overlooking the road to Meijel, preparatory to making an attack on the town next day. The first phase, as far as Heitrag, was completed without incident. The Royal Scots and the K.O.S.B. then went through, while the Scots Fusiliers remained in Broek and prepared to attack Schans and Hof. This attack opened on November 5 from a start line south of Broek, with "B" Company on the right and "D" on the left, having a troop of tanks of the Grenadier Guards and some "flail" tanks in support. However, some of the "flails" became bogged and others were blown up in a minefield; while the tanks of the Grenadiers, moving further to the left, stuck in marshland sown with mines and were picked off by the enemy's anti-tank guns. "B" and "D" Companies pressed forward unaided through heavy fire from 88-millimetre guns, Spandaus and small arms, crossed the Deurne canal and reached Schans. "A" and "C" Companies, coming up behind, were pinned

down in the open by enemy fire and were unable to reach Hof7, which lay only 700 yards from Meijel. The Fusiliers' forward assault companies were now in a serious predicament and a troop of Grenadier tanks was ordered up to cover them. The tanks managed to negotiate a minefield and reached "B" and "D" Companies, which were holding on in the hope that their ammunition would last until reinforcements arrived. The Fusiliers suffered heavy casualties, and two carriers which were evacuating the wounded were blown up on mines. November 5 1944 was subsequently known in the 44th Brigade as "Black Sunday".

During the battle Sergeant Rees of "B" Company performed a feat of gallantry for which he was afterwards awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. This account of the episode appears in the War Diary:

"Sergeant Rees handed over to his corporal and crawled off on his own. For some time nothing was seen of him and the worst was feared. Suddenly, to the astonishment of all who saw, Germans began popping out of a group of slit trenches. Up they came, one after the other, until some 18 or 20 of them stood in the open, with Sergeant Rees at the tail end.

"He lined them up in the open while bullets, mortar bombs and shells flew around and calmly searched them. He threw away their rifles, but kept Luger pistols and Schneissers. The disarming completed, he signed to the Germans to march before him across the minefield to 'B' Company. Sergeant Rees rejoined his commanding officer with 14 prisoners under his command. The others had fallen by the wayside.

"Sergeant Rees was one of those rare individuals, a man totally devoid of fear. It is said that when asked what made him do such a thing he answered that he needed a watch and wanted a Luger. That may or may not be true; but it is certainly in keeping with his attitude towards personal danger."

It is sad to record that Rees lost his life in February 1945 at Schloss Calbeck.

Further advance was now impossible. The operation against Meijel was therefore abandoned and the Fusiliers withdrawn to Leisel, with the exception of "A" Company which was left with the K.O.S.B. to hold a start line position at Broek. Next day the Fusiliers went into divisional reserve in an area by the main road from Asten to Meijel. Despite the arrival of some reinforcements the Battalion was much under strength, and Colonel Mackenzie decided to reorganise it temporarily with three rifle companies instead of four. "C" Company was disbanded and provided one platoon for each of the other three companies. On November 7 Lord Trenchard, the Colonel of the Regiment, visited the Battalion.

November 15 saw the Fusiliers back in the area about Schans and Hof to take over from the K.O.S.B., who had patrolled from Neerkant to the outskirts of Meijel and had found the Germans withdrawing to the north side of the Deurne Canal. "B" Company occupied Hof; "A" Company took up a position at the south-east corner of a plantation known as "Diamond Wood"; while the carrier platoon reconnoitred to the north-east. The area was littered with mines—Teller-mines, "R" "—mines, and a type of wooden Schu-mine which the Fusiliers had not previously encountered. This type was unresponsive to mine detectors, and had to be located underground by probing with skewers or fence wire. Another, the "S" "—mine, was a devilish contrivance which, when detonated, shot up a cannister of shrapnel that exploded at waist height. The Royal Engineers cleared 500 Schu-mines and 100 Teller mines from the "Diamond Wood" area.

At dawn on November 18 a patrol of "D" Company, sent out from Schans, was driven back from the canal by Spandau fire; but another patrol from "A" Company managed to establish itself

about two yards from the bank. Under cover of darkness reconnaissance parties from the supporting tank crews went up to assess the possibilities of clearing the mine-planted bund and of bridging the canal. They outflanked Meijel from the south and exploited to the east towards Beringe. On the 15th Division's front, the 227th Brigade crossed the Deurne canal on November 19 and linked up with the 51st Division at Beringe. The Fusiliers, temporarily under command of the 46th Brigade, crossed at Marienhoeve and advancing northwards through Helenaveen cleared the road, thus enabling the 46th Brigade, having crossed by a class 40 bridge at Hoogetbrug, to gain a further six miles eastwards to Sevenum.

This was the wettest November for 40 years and the battlefield was a sea of mud. Also the Germans were pursuing a scorched earth policy by setting fire to buildings and houses along their lines of retreat. In the 6th Bn "A" Company had now taken the lead, but was held up by the enemy near a wood on the Helenaveen road and stopped there for the night. Next morning, November 21, Helenaveen was taken without difficulty and handed over to the Cameronians of the 46th Brigade. The Fusiliers were withdrawn into billets in small farms, cottages, barns and outbuildings at Grashoek, half way between Helenaveen and Beringe, where they found the roofs gave welcome cover from the endless rain. The Battalion remained there for nearly a fortnight, which it spent in training its reinforcements and in mine clearance. When it finally left the rest area its immediate task was to press eastwards to force the enemy away from the Maas. Ten miles of flat and boggy country stretched from Grashoek to the Maas. Blerick, on the west bank of the river, lay due east and on the opposite bank was Venlo, linked to Blerick by a railway and a road bridge spanning about 300 yards of river.

6th Bn: *Blenck*

The Germans had turned Blerick into a powerful fortress and had fully exploited the natural defences of the low-lying marshy land which surrounded the place. The sunken ground was in full view from high buildings in the town which were very suitable for directing artillery fire. The Fusiliers, with the other Battalions of the 44th Brigade, studied a large sand-table model of the terrain and a conference to outline the plan of attack was attended by all ranks down to platoon sergeant. Four hundred guns of many types and sizes were to soften up the enemy defences and neutralise the opposing gun-power. Many devices of the species known collectively as "funnies" were to be used in the attack: "flail" and bridging tanks; flame-throwing tanks called "crocodiles"; and "kangaroos", which were armoured personnel carriers. The 1st Canadian Rocket Projector Unit, with a "mattress" which fired more than 200 rockets simultaneously into an area 200 yards square, was also to be employed.

The operation was planned in three phases. Phase one was an artillery concentration on Blerick lasting for two hours and a half. Phase two was the advance of the armour, beating six lanes through minefields and barbed wire (the "flails"), dropping huge bundles of faggots into an anti-tank ditch and bridging it (assault vehicles, R.E.) and continuing the six lanes up to Blerick (the "flails" again) while heavy Churchill tanks B were to provide covering fire and control the traffic. In phase three, the infantry were to advance through the cleared lanes in "kangaroos" up to the outskirts of Blerick, then disembark and clear the town, house by house, supported by the "crocodiles". The infantry attack was to be made by the 44th Brigade, having the 7th Seaforth under command, with the Fusiliers as the left assaulting Battalion and the Royal Scots

on the right. Dry weather was essential for this plan, but it rained for several days before the operation, and on the eve of the battle the Fusiliers were ordered to carry Bangalore torpedoes, which were tubes packed with explosive for blowing gaps in barbed wire, as it seemed that they might have to do their own clearance and operate without armoured support. During the night of December 2 the Gordon Highlanders of the 227th Brigade on the Fusiliers' left put on for the enemy's benefit a programme of gramophone records which relayed through loudspeakers the noises of a great concourse of tracked vehicles on the move. They also exploded a number of Bangalore torpedoes in order to divert the enemy's attention away from the area of the forthcoming attack and focus it further to the north, where the approach might seem more probable because of better ground.

At 5.25 a.m. on December 3 the artillery barrage came down and at 6 a.m. the Fusiliers moved off mounted in "kangaroos" to the assembly area. Ahead of them lay barbed wire 400 yards deep, and minefields; beyond those lay the anti-tank ditch, 25 feet wide and 11 feet deep, with water at the bottom. Along the two or three miles of the Blerick perimeter a system of defences 500 yards deep of mines, trenches and pillboxes gave the Germans a secure frontage. The start line was almost a mile west of the anti-tank ditch. The artillery and mortar concentration tore a way through the barbed wire, and the "flails" slowly beat a pathway through the minefield. The assault engineers successfully bridged the anti-tank ditch, and four of the six lanes were opened. At 9.25 a.m. the Fusiliers were carried forward to two lanes numbered 5 and 6. "The going was terrible ", says an account. "The 'kangaroos' lurched and lumbered along, and one after another stuck in the mud. We got out and 'hoofed' it all the way."

"A" Company, leading the Fusiliers, managed to get right forward to the site of a wrecked railway bridge on the bank of the Maas. "D" Company, following, swung left across the double railway line. Battalion Headquarters came next, and then "B" Company, which also swung left and penetrated into the north-east corner of Blerick. The house-to-house clearance operation proved unexpectedly simple. The garrison, punished by the shelling and still bemused, remained in its cellars and offered only feeble resistance. By 4 p.m. the Fusiliers were well into the town, although enemy shelling and mortar fire continued to be troublesome. By dusk, at about 4 p.m., the whole town was occupied. A heavy counter-attack was unlikely, as the enemy had fled across the Maas, but he had taken with him craft which could bring raiding parties back across the river. Raiding parties, in fact, did re-cross the river; but they achieved nothing.

Lieutenant-General Martin says: ". . . the Battle of Blerick, where everything went right and so much might have gone wrong. Later, fittingly, it was to become the theme of a War Office pamphlet. Of this skilfully-planned and skilfully-fought battle, the psychological effect on the 44th Brigade was immense and lasting. Previously, the Brigade had undergone a series of bitter and exhausting experiences, particularly in the Gheel bridgehead and at Meijel. Now, it had got just the fillip it needed and was never to look back."

Chapter XIV

ON THE WAY TO THE RHINE— 4/5th AND 6th Bns—1945

4/5th BATTALION: *The Roer Pocket—Lind and Stein—
Into Germany—Alpon*
6th Bn: *The Siegfried Line— The capture of
Cleve—Goch*

4/5th BATTALION

TOWARDS the end of November 1944 the 52nd Division returned from Walcheren to the line, and was based at s'Hertogenbosch on the lower reaches of the Maas. In the first week of December the Division was in the vicinity of Geilenkirchen, on the Dutch and German border west of the River Roer and on the extreme right of the British line where it joined the flank of the Ninth United States Army. The West Wall reinforced the Siegfried Line about Geilenkirchen. The Division's move of some 70 miles across the communications of the Second Army had been made through a countryside covered with frozen snow. The amenities of Geilenkirchen were poor compared with those of s'Hertogenbosch, but the pit-head baths which were available in this state-owned, model mining locality proved a welcome asset.

Very soon after its arrival the 52nd Division was selected to take part in a subsidiary operation with the 43rd Division and the Guards Armoured Division to pinch out an obdurate German salient around Heinsburg. However, Field-Marshal Von Rundstedt's surprise attack in the Ardennes with Antwerp as its objective had the effect of cancelling that operation. On December 28 the K.O.S.B. were heavily attacked during a snowstorm in their positions at Vintelen and Kievelberg to the north of Geilenkirchen, and the Glasgow Highlanders at Tripsrath on December 30; but a tank attack supported by artillery and a company of the 6th Highland Light Infantry succeeded in restoring the situation, after which the Germans became less aggressive. The Tripsrath position and one adjacent to it at Bergden had already been found unpleasant of tenure by the Scots Fusiliers during their earlier period in the front line.

4/5th BATTALION: *The Roer Pocket*

At the beginning of 1945 the Germans were still west of the Roer, and it became necessary to eliminate an awkward “pocket” which jutted into Dutch territory on the near side of the river. Accordingly an operation was planned by XII Corps to straighten the British line between Roermond and its junction with the Americans north of Aachen. This operation was an essential preface to the eventual crossing of the Rhine.

The XII Corps plan was given the code-name “Operation Blackcock “. Its aim was to drive all Germans from the territory bounded on the north by the River Roer, on the east by the River Wurm and on the south and west by a line running west from Geilenkirchen through Gangelt and Sittard. Three main thrusts were to be made. The 7th Armoured Division was to strike northward from the neighbourhood of Susteren in the general direction of Roermund, while the 8th Armoured Brigade and the 155th Brigade of the 52nd Division advanced on a parallel axis slightly to the south, splitting into three separate prongs through the Echterbosch. Moving through this wooded country the two brigades, armoured and infantry, were to meet, in the region of Waldfeucht, the remaining two brigades of the 52nd Division, the 156th and 157th, which were to debouch due eastward from the vicinity of Sittard on an axis following the southern edge of the Echterbosch. The 43rd Division, which had taken over from the 52nd Division at Geilenkirchen after the operations there in December, was to press northward simultaneously to harass the German central positions and threaten his lines of communication.

An impressive weight of artillery was assembled for the assault, under command of Brigadier Crosland, who had directed the Army Group Royal Artillery during operations on the Scheldt. It included the 1st Canadian Rocket Battery, firing ripple salvoes of 350 missiles. The “flying bedstead “, as this new weapon was popularly called, fired the equivalent of 5.5-inch shells at a range of 5,000 to 7,000 yards. When the weather intervened to jeopardise the success of the attack it became a decisive factor in the battle. The 52nd Division was also provided with “flail” and “crocodile” tanks.

The opening moves in the morning darkness of January 16 took place in fog, frost and bitter cold. A change in the weather normally would not have worried those in control of the operation, but at the critical hour a rise in temperature and a quick thaw at once endangered the plan. The tanks began to slither and settle in the mud, with the result that although Roermund was reached, the timetable was seriously dislocated. The collapse of a bridge between Echt and Waldfeucht on the axis of the 8th Armoured Brigade and the 155th Brigade caused a column of tanks to be withdrawn and redirected from Sittard; only one of the three columns in this phase of the advance reached its destination, and that by an unplanned route. For the two brigades of the 52nd Division advancing from the Sittard start line the confusion arising from these delays had serious consequences, one of which was the need to replot the intricate artillery programme. General Hakewill Smith decided that the success of the operation depended upon his two brigades joining up with the forward elements of the 7th Armoured Division, and in spite of the likelihood of the thaw continuing he adhered to the agreed plan and set his forces in motion. He was fully justified by results, as although German resistance in the north was stubborn, in the central and southern areas it yielded to pressure.

The Scots Fusiliers entered the battle at 6.30 a.m. on January 18. The 156th Brigade plan was to use as a spearhead the armour and two companies of the Fusiliers, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel D. O'Flynn of the Yeomanry, followed by the 5th Highland Light Infantry with one squadron of the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry and one squadron of "flail" tanks manned by the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry. Debouching from the town of Tuddern, this force was to breach a wide, thickly sown minefield, cross a stream 20 feet wide, the Saeffeler Beck, and a road beyond it, and so enable the remaining two companies of Scots Fusiliers to pass through and take the villages of Lind, Stein and Heilder on the outskirts of the Echterbosch. The Divisional Commander, who attended the final conference, made it clear that the opening phase was to be entirely an armoured operation under the command of Colonel O'Flynn, whose force would be known as the "assault group". Lieutenant-Colonel Gosselin, commanding the Scots Fusiliers, while he was to be in charge of the whole force, was to have no command or control over the "assault group".

The ground forward of Tuddern was flat and open and the normal paths and tracks were obscured by deep snow. A little over a mile north of the town were woods through which ran the main stream of the Saeffeler Beck, while north of the stream the ground rose steeply for 150 yards to a road which passed through both Lind and Stein. It was known that the minefield ran parallel with and not far south of the Beck, and it was suspected that the surrounding orchards and the roadsides concealed anti-personnel mines. The tasks of the "assault group" were to deal with the mines, bridge the stream and secure the road. The Germans defending the "Roer Pocket" were the 183rd Division, the 176th Division, the Hubner Regiment and elements of the 59th Division, all troops of considerable quality.

"A" and "B" Companies of the Scots Fusiliers were assigned to the assault group. As commander of the whole attacking force Colonel Gosselin travelled with his signaller in the squadron leader's tank at the rear of the "assault group". The Corps Commander had considered it essential to create two bridges over the Beck, so the group was arranged in two columns, each of which included gun tanks and a bridge tank, with infantry platoons interspersed. "A" Company was on the right or eastern route with Stein as its objective, and "B" Company on the left or western route, making for Lind.

Everything went well at the start. The artillery barrage came down, the chosen routes offered no difficulties and the "flails" found the right places. At about 8 a.m., however, the first hitch occurred. The thaw which had beset the 7th Armoured Division further north two days earlier was now softening the downlands about Tuddern, and the tanks could only move sluggishly over the marshy ground near the Saeffeler Beck. The bridges had been successfully brought forward, but armour was held up at the first crossing place. The right-hand crossing was abandoned after great efforts, and "A" Company switched to the left route. The Germans, now amply warned, were bringing down heavy mortar fire on the banks of the stream. Major R. L. Reid, commanding "B" Company, was wounded in the arm, but remained with his company. For a time it appeared as though the whole operation might become bogged along with the tanks. At this juncture the Brigade Commander, speaking over the wireless to Colonel Gosselin, gave emphatic instructions that the stream must be crossed even if the armour could not continue. Colonel Gosselin at once ordered "B" Company to cross and seize Lind, and "A" Company to follow and pass through to Stein as soon as Lind fell. The Scots Fusiliers, leaving the tanks, quickly crossed the only footbridge over the water and formed up on the far bank facing the orchards of the Echterbosch.

By about 9.30 a.m. "B" Company was firmly established in Lind, and "A" Company had passed through and was descending upon Stein. The Scots Fusiliers, as the 52nd divisional history observes, pressed on alone with gallantry and resolution; they had lost touch with the guns, but their mountain training stood them in good stead. With packs, wireless sets and mortars on their backs they went over the Saeffeler Beck, their artillery forward observation officers with them, though no tracked or wheeled vehicle could follow.

It was apparent that no armour would be able to move that day from the banks of the Beck, although three tanks had crossed the stream and were lying inert. Down by the footbridge, tanks, bridges, jeeps and parties of Royal Engineers with their equipment were equally immobilised and under intensive mortar fire. Colonel Gosselin left his tank and ordered "C" Company, which had now come up, to go forward in the wake of the leading companies and occupy positions in German trenches on the Lind road. He followed the company with his Advanced Headquarters, leaving instructions for "D" Company and the rest of the Battalion Headquarters to join him as soon as possible.

In the German trenches, which were just south of Lind, the Colonel, his headquarters, and most of "C" Company were soon pinned down by heavy and precise fire. The remainder of "C" Company succeeded in occupying some trenches to the north of the road, but it also suffered casualties from mortar and gun fire. The trenches became badly congested, as the 5th Highland Light Infantry arrived to open their attack on Havert, another village to the north-west of Lind. Colonel Gosselin accordingly moved his headquarters forward into Lind, sharing "B" Company's headquarters, while "C" Company remained in the trenches.

"A" Company was having trouble in Stein. Owing to the bottleneck at the footbridge, and to avoid enemy mines, it had advanced in single file. It was prevented from deploying on reaching the village, where the houses had to be cleared individually step by step. Colonel Gosselin reached Lind in time to receive a report from Major Elliot, commanding "A" Company, that he had suffered many casualties and had insufficient resources to deal with more than the houses on the north side of the village. Accordingly "C" Company was directed to advance from the Lind trenches and clear the houses on the south side. "D" Company, so far uncommitted, was to remain in the vacated trenches and to dig in about the bridge, together with the mortar and carrier platoons and other specialists, as there was nowhere else for them to go. "C" Company reported that the enemy in Stein were continuing to impose severe casualties and that 10 houses had still to be taken. "D" Company was then sent forward into Stein, and by 4 p.m. the three companies together had cleared the last German out of the village. The final phase of the operation was a fine piece of work by Lieutenant McDonald and his platoon.

On subsequent examination it was found that Stein had been strongly fortified. Each house was separated from its neighbour by an orchard, through which trenches had been dug connecting it to the next house; so that when one house was captured the defenders used the trench at the back to escape into the next, from which in due course the stratagem was repeated. The country on the north side of the village was open, so that it was impracticable to stage an outflanking movement or to establish a flanking fire position, while the south side was protected from attack by minefields. The effect was that every house became a fortress which had to be dealt with separately, and only great personal bravery and first class junior leadership could cope with such a situation.

The outstanding example among many was that of Fusilier Donnini of "A" Company, whose heroic conduct earned a posthumous award of the Victoria Cross. He was 19 years of age and had been in the Army for only six months, and overseas for two. His was the only Victoria Cross awarded to a member of the Regiment during the second World War. The citation states:

"In North-West Europe on 18th January, 1945, a Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers supported by tanks was the leading Battalion in the assault of the German position between the Rivers Roer and Maas. This consisted of a broad belt of mine-fields and wire on the other side of a stream. As the result of a thaw the armour was unable to cross the stream and the infantry had to continue the assault without the support of the tanks. Fusilier Donnini's platoon was ordered to attack a small village. As they left their trenches the platoon came under concentrated machine gun and rifle fire from the houses and Fusilier Donnini was hit by a bullet in the head. After a few minutes he recovered consciousness, charged down thirty yards of open road and threw a grenade into the nearest window.

"The enemy fled through the gardens of four houses, closely pursued by Fusilier Donnini and the survivors of his platoon. Under heavy fire at seventy yards range Fusilier Donnini and two companions crossed an open space and reached the cover of a wooden barn, thirty yards from the enemy trenches. Fusilier Donnini, still bleeding profusely from his wound, went into the open under intense close-range fire and carried one of his companions, who had been wounded, into the barn. Taking a Bren gun he again went into the open, firing as he went. He was wounded a second time but recovered and went on firing until a third bullet hit a grenade which he was carrying and killed him.

"The superb gallantry and self-sacrifice of Fusilier Donnini drew the enemy fire away from his companions on to himself. As the result of this, the platoon were able to capture the position, accounting for thirty Germans and two machine guns. Throughout this action, fought from beginning to end at point blank range, the dash, determination and magnificent courage of Fusilier Donnini enabled his comrades to overcome an enemy more than twice their own number."

The Scots Fusiliers consolidated their positions in Stein and remained there for the night. Their casualties in the fight for the village were 17 killed and 46 wounded; the enemy dead numbered 18, and 45 Germans were taken prisoner. The Divisional History pays the following tribute to the Battalion:

"So far as the operations of 156th Brigade on the first day of the infantry assault are concerned, there is no question among their comrades that the brunt of the battle fell on the 4/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers. They suffered the delays at the crossing of the Beck and bravely endured. They went on without tank support to their allotted objectives. They ultimately took Stein with companies and platoons sadly depleted by casualties. There is a poetic rightness in the fact that one of their number, Fusilier Dennis Donnini, earned in Stein the Victoria Cross."

While fighting was still going on in Stein, the 6th Cameronians, advancing over the minefield, wire and steep banks of the Saeffeler Beck, were brought forward in the afternoon to attack the village of Heilder, which had been the third objective of the Scots Fusiliers. Their orders, received at midnight, were that whether Stein fell or not, Heilder must be taken before morning. The importance of Heilder was that its capture was bound to result in the fall of the town of Hongen, which straddled the only road across the Beck leading to Saeffelen and Heinsburg. The Cameronians were without tanks but had the support of the 9th Army Group Royal Artillery.

Early in the morning of January 19 one of their companies entered Hongen from the rear. All day the town had been enveloped in a smoke-screen laid by more than 11,000 rounds from the mortar platoons of the Highland Light Infantry. By daylight on January 19 all Germans had been driven out of the triangle formed by Stein, Heilder and Hongen.

On January 19 the Saeffeler Beck was bridged and the countryside cleared of mines and other obstructions as far as Hongen. In the afternoon the 6th Cameronians, with tanks, shot their way into Breberen with some loss, all the platoon commanders of one company being killed or wounded. Other villages were gradually taken and much needed food and ammunition was brought forward across the stream. On January 20 the 52nd Division was joined by advanced parties of the 43rd Division, thrusting up from the south; and on the same day the 6th H.L.I. captured Bocket, on a crest of down-land overlooking the Roer basin. After the fall of Breberen and Bocket the fighting dwindled into a series of isolated collisions with German "suicide squads". On the northern wing of the divisional advance three days of relentless fighting had brought the 155th Brigade into Waldfeucht, one of the key points in the Roer triangle. The Germans fought doggedly, especially against the two K.O.S.B. Battalions, who had outstanding success although confronted by Tiger tanks and mobile guns

. "The stand of the Borderers at Waldfeucht against the heaviest counter-attack the enemy could muster", observes the Divisional History, "undoubtedly saved 'Operation Blackcock' ". The enemy tanks withdrew from Waldfeucht on the night of January 21. The climax of the battle for the Roer Pocket was the fall of Heinsburg, which was captured by the 155th Brigade moving quickly from Waldfeucht.

A 48-hour spell in defensive positions south of Koninesbosch followed, during which the temperature dropped to two degrees below zero. On the way to Bocket to relieve the 7th Cameronians, who were attacking about Opspingam, a chance bomb from a lone German plane killed one Fusilier in the 4/5th Battalion and wounded another. On January 30 at 6.30 a.m. "B" Company with gun tanks and "crocodiles" was ordered to attack Schundorf from the direction of Hontem in order to free a company of Cameronians which had been isolated and surrounded at the north end of the village. During the preceding night the Glasgow Highlanders had made a costly but unsuccessful attempt to relieve the same company.

In this attack a troop of tanks was to cover an assault by "B" Company from adjacent high ground overlooking Schundorf. The mortar platoon was to give supporting fire from Hontem, where the flame-throwing "crocodiles" were to remain at call. Since the exact whereabouts of the Cameronians was unknown, the tanks were to fire only with their Besa machine guns. "B" Company was to make its approach widely extended on the eastern side of the road from Hontem to Schundorf. At 7.50 a.m. the Company had assembled in Hontem and was making its reconnaissances, and the 3-inch mortars were taking up their fire positions; but the "crocodiles" were lying in a ditch into which they had slithered helplessly from the frozen surface above, while one of the three gun tanks had been disabled by a mine. This left only two pieces of armour to support the operation. The start of the attack was therefore postponed by Colonel Gosselin until 8.30 a.m. The "crocodiles" eventually arrived at 8.25, and at about the same time an unexplained troop of tanks made its appearance and was posted at the north end of Hontem. The attack was launched at the amended starting time.

"It was the sort of battle one dreams about," wrote Colonel Gosselin in a personal account. "The tanks—including the strangers—and the mortars laid a smoke-screen and shot in the

company. The infantry deployed and moved steadily across the open. The tanks continued firing until the infantry were right up to their objective, whereupon the enemy fired a few rounds and then ran out with their hands up. Fifteen prisoners were taken. We had no casualties. The remnants of the 7th Cameronians were found intact, if somewhat shaken. The dead and wounded of the Glasgow Highlanders and Cameronians were brought in—and the situation in this part of the world definitely cleared up. This more or less ended the fighting as far as the 4/5th Battalion was concerned. Our final operation, which was the capture of Vinn, Haaserdreisch and Dreisch, with the support of a squadron of the 3/18th Hussars, turned out to be purely a peacetime move, the enemy having evacuated some hours before. We did, however, take 13 prisoners who had either got lost or deserted.”

The Germans had been driven across the Roer. This had cost the 52nd Lowland Division the lives of 101 of its officers and men; 752 had been wounded. The wounded officers of the Scots Fusiliers were Major R. L. Reid, Captains C. C. I. Murdoch and H. Dow, and Lieutenant A. W. McDonald.

4/5th BATTALION: *Into Germany*

In describing this stage in the campaign Chester Wilmot writes: “It was the necessity of keeping the Rhine open which led the Wehrmacht to present such fierce and sustained opposition to the Reichswald attack. Hitler had ordered Von Rundstedt to defend the river as an indispensable route for the flow of coal and processed steel to his war industries now that the Russians had virtually isolated Silesia.”

During February and March of 1945, 21 Army Group, with the Ninth United States Army under command, swept on from the Maas and the Roer to the lower reaches of the Rhine. Within the Second Army the march to the Rhine was under Canadian command, but the majority of the infantry employed were British Territorial Army units in XXX Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Horrocks. Of his five divisions three were Scottish: the 5th (Scottish), the 51st (Highland) and the 52nd (Lowland). The focal point of the operation, code-named “Veritable”, was the German town of Wesel, north of Duisburg. The main thrust was directed south-eastwards down the valley of the Maas and through the Reichswald, roughly following the curve of the Rhine, with a view to destroying the German forces and reserves deployed for the protection of that waterway. The most powerful concentration of artillery fire power hitherto contrived heralded the opening passages on February 8. The entry into the operation of the 52nd Division from Gennepe did not take place until February

14; its advance at first followed the general axis bearing of south-east for some 10 miles, before turning east and then swinging north-west through Alphen to the Rhine. South of the British line of advance the Ninth United States Army, delayed by floods from the fractured Roer dams, began moving on February 23 and joined forces with the Canadian Army on March 3. On March 7 the American First Army seized a rich prize, an intact bridge over the Rhine at Remagen, south of Bonn.

The 52nd Division made its way slowly from the area of Geilenkirchen towards Gennepe to relieve the 3rd Division on the Maas on a long front extending northwards from Venlo to about Boxmeer, which required the manpower of all three infantry brigades to hold it. The Scots Fusiliers took over from the 1st South Lancashire Regiment at the small village of Smakt, where

they remained for a week. "A", "B" and "C" Companies and the carrier platoon were in position on the river bank, while "D" Company, Battalion Headquarters and the remaining specialist platoons were disposed about 1,000 yards in rear. Enemy artillery and mortar fire were negligible, and most of the Battalion's activity consisted of attempts by the mortar platoon to drive the enemy from positions in farms on the opposite bank. The river was in full spate as a result of the breaking of the Roer dams, which made offensive "boat patrols" by either side out of the question. The Germans deserted the east bank as a consequence of Field-Marshal Montgomery's threat further to the north, and on February 18 the Battalion crossed the Mook bridge to Gennepe. It was told that it would remain there for three hours, but eventually stayed for eight days.

The 52nd Division was at close quarters with the enemy at Afferden, two miles south of Gennepe, the hinge of the German left flank. It was opposed by the German First Parachute Army. The core of the enemy defence was an ancient Dutch frontier castle, Kasteel Blijenbeek, with walls so stout as to resist the impact of 5.5-inch shells, and a wide moat. The Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment, the H.L.I. Battalions and the K.O.S.B.'s were engaged in hard fighting against stubborn resistance in Afferden, Afferden Wood and around the castle. The Scots Fusiliers were not at Afferden, but from February 27 were in touch with the German parachute regiments at Goch, where the Battalion had replaced the 7th Argylls of the 51st (Highland) Division. The relief was conducted in the dark, and in the course of it a jeep and a mortar carrier were blown up by mines on the Helsum road. The companies were scattered; "A" and "C" were in the small village of Hulm, "B" Company in a farmhouse to the west, and "D" Company in a larger village called Ober Helsum. Battalion Tactical Headquarters was set up in a dilapidated farm a mile to the north of Hulm. From these positions the Battalion was ordered forward on March 1 to Heider Helsum and an adjacent wood.

The strength and dispositions of the Germans were unknown and their intentions obscure; the only guide was any variation which could be detected in shelling and mortar fire. The Battalion was ordered to occupy Drie Hofe, a nearby wood, and some outlying buildings, while Battalion Headquarters moved to Hulm. Because of minefields, deep craters and blown bridges the only usable route was an exposed one linking Hulm, Kirkenhof and Heider Helsum, along which one company must follow another. "C" Company, which took the lead with an artillery forward observation officer, went too far and encountered an enemy strong point sited in houses and a wood. The company was surprised by intense rapid fire at pointblank range and suffered some casualties. No request for artillery support could be made, as the leading platoon was practically inside the strong point. "B" Company, following next, infiltrated into Drie Hofe along the course of a stream in spite of heavy shell fire, but could not help its comrades in "C" Company, who were obliged to crawl back to the shelter of nearby buildings leaving only one platoon in the wood under heavy mortar fire. Meanwhile "A" Company secured the buildings which were its objective.

The situation was eased during the night by developments on the left flank which drove the Germans out of the town of Weeze. At 1 a.m. on March 2 "B" and "C" Companies of the Fusiliers felt their way forward in darkness by dykes and streams towards some bridges, where they had orders to gain touch with the 53rd (Welsh) Division in its advance on a southeasterly bearing from Weeze. Apart from encounters with mines, and with eight Germans who fled, the bridges were secured without incident, and the companies settled down to wait for daylight. No Germans

were discovered next day, although a thorough search was made through wet fields and dripping woods. By the night of March 2 the battle had temporarily receded, and in the little village of Bunshof the Fusiliers found, for the first time in the vicinity of the Maas, houses with roofs that did not leak, doors that would shut, and glazed windows. The recent spell of activity had been a trying one, and the many mines strewn by the enemy on his line of retreat had imposed losses on the Battalion. "C" Company, commanded by Major C. Cumes, had fared worst, its losses including six non-commissioned officers and men killed. Major Cumes himself was wounded, and did not subsequently return to the Battalion. Captain Craig had been killed by a mortar bomb which pierced the roof of a farm building in which he was housed.

Amongst the dead of "C" Company was Corporal Carmichael, whose loss made a sad gap in the ranks. "He was one ", wrote his commanding officer, "who could not abide the peacetime routine of soldiering. He was continually going absent. Every Monday morning saw him 'on the mat'. And every Saturday morning the R.S.M. would ask if 'Buffer' Carmichael could be allowed out to play football for the Battalion. He was a most likeable character and one just couldn't be angry with him. When the fighting began, 'Buffer' was in his element and, from company runner at Walcheren, he became a corporal and commanded a section in 'C' Company with skill and determination. His death while leading a section against an enemy strong point was a great loss to the Battalion."

4/5th BATTALION: Alpon

Alpon was the last township which the German paratroops held against the pressure of the Allies on their move to the Rhine. For the Germans a stand at Alpon was essential to enable their main body to disengage and withdraw; and for that reason it became the scene of hard and bitter fighting.

At Alpon the British artillery was hampered in its actions by the converging of divisions in the overcrowded "Wesel Pocket ", and its schedule was upset by the reported capture of Huck, a small village east of Alpon and slightly to the south. Fire which was to have been directed on an area about Huck was cancelled. The maps used for planning the operation proved to be unreliable and the defence overprints given to the Scots Fusiliers did not disclose that a wood of irregular shape confronting the southerly houses of Alpon was on ground which dropped a sheer fifty feet to an open plain, where there were strengthened buildings and slit trenches which the Germans had incorporated into an effective system of defensive cross-fire. This sudden fall in the ground was an obstacle to the British supporting tanks; while the village itself was found to have uncharted extensions, resulting presumably from its growth between the wars. The plan of attack was dislocated further by the postponement of the start for two hours. The operation had now become essentially an infantryman's battle, to be fought at close quarters from house to house and adjusted to circumstances as they might arise.

The village of Alpon was situated near the River Rhine, on the main highway from Geldern to Wesel. A secondary road ran north-westwards from the centre of the village, and to the east of it the highway intersected a railway which then ran parallel to the front line from Reinberg to Birten. A stream encircled the village to the south and west, and the woods, a common feature of the countryside between the Maas and the Rhine, thinned out into several groups, including a

large, dense growth half a mile south of the village, and some scattered clumps to the west on the other side of the highway.

In the attack by the 156th Brigade, the Scots Fusiliers were to leave their assembly area in the big southern wood, swing out well to the west of the village and, circling from the north, come down on the eastern fringe to secure the road and rail crossing. An intersection of minor roads to the south-east was also to be seized; and then, With all exits blocked, a final blow was to be directed from the big wood at the southern extremities of the village. The 7th Cameronians were to move down from the plateau of Bonnlngharot, above the Geldern, and cover the western gateway, while the 6th Cameronians were to maintain pressure well to the north of the main operation and guard the flank of the Fusiliers. The Guards Armoured Division was given the task of driving the Germans from Bonning, an outer bastion of Alpon lying to the north-west.

The 4/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers went forward in troop-carrying vehicles from Bunshof and debussed at Issum. It was still daylight, but the Fusiliers were to relieve the Monmouthshire Regiment, which was in close contact with the enemy and under shell fire. Guides led the companies up a road, where they dispersed into scattered woodland. While the relief was taking place a shell burst on the position, killing one Fusilier and wounding Captains Leggett and Ramsay, Lieutenant McGhee, and another Fusilier. The disablement of these three officers left "D" Company entirely without commanders, and some changes had to be made during a night of relentless shelling. Captain Currie took command of "A" Company, and Captain Macdonald, M.C., of "D" Company. At 7.30 a.m. Colonel Gosselin went to a conference at 156th Brigade Headquarters to receive his orders for the attack, but it was 10 a.m. before he returned to the Battalion. This left insufficient time for company reconnaissances on the ground; the assault was therefore planned from the map. The start line was the forward edge of the big wood to the south of the village. After an intense artillery concentration lasting 45 minutes, two troops of tanks were to cover with gun fire the first sweep of the leading company round the west side of the village. Tanks were also to shoot in the company which was to assault the village from the southern woods in the final phase of the attack. A troop of "crocodiles" was also to support the operation. The Battalion set off at 2.30 p.m. on its long approach march through the wood. "We knew", wrote Colonel Gosselin, "that the Ninth United States Army was on our right, the Guards on our left; but we did *not* know anything about the enemy."

"A" Company was given the task in the opening phase of encircling and attacking Alpon from the north. To reach its objective it had to traverse two miles of exposed ground, dotted with small woods and farm buildings, and cross the secondary road which ran northwards from the village. As "A" Company broke cover it was immediately met with Spandau, mortar and shell fire, but it went doggedly on, leaving its casualties, and after three and a half hours of contending with determined opposition, including a stubborn stand by the Germans on the line of the secondary road, finally gained its objective. "D" Company later followed the same circuitous route, and passed through "A" Company's position to seal the eastern end of Alpon by occupying the road and rail crossing. It made remarkably swift progress, and captured 17 prisoners. Meanwhile "B" Company was already engaged in the third phase of the attack, advancing along the Geldern road and crossing the stream near the western edge of Alpon to seize a junction of minor roads to the south-east of the village. To reach its objective this company had to negotiate the open plain between wood and village, which gave an admirable field of fire to enemy self-propelled guns, mortars and machine guns sited in buildings and earthworks. Germans were in every field and

barring every path, and darkness was falling. "At this time ", observes Colonel Gosselin, "everything appeared to be going badly. It looked as if we would fail and suffer heavy casualties in the process."

The speed and success of "D" Company's advance, however, much improved the situation; and "C" Company, which had been waiting in the big southern wood throughout the afternoon, now slid down the bluff in the twilight. Using fire and movement methodically it fought its way into the village from the south, and by last light had forced a way into the first group of houses, which were stoutly defended. The ring had now closed about Alpon. "C" Company at once formed a bridgehead over the stream which "B" Company had crossed further to the west and enabled the Royal Engineers to clear the cratered roadway. It then sent out a patrol to gain touch with "D" Company on the eastern side of the village, and soon all companies were in communication. At 11 p.m., after nine hours fighting, the Battalion could report its success to Brigade Headquarters. The German garrison slipped away that night, and Alpon was completely occupied next morning.

Some centres of enemy resistance were still holding out to the north of the village. The 7th Cameronians, on the left of the Scots Fusiliers, were not in serious trouble at any time; but further out on the same flank one company of the 6th Cameronians was badly mauled on emerging from Alpon along the line of the railway running to Birten, and two other companies came under fire over open sights from German self-propelled guns and were then overrun. The casualties of the 6th Cameronians were 4 officers and 169 other ranks. The Fusiliers counted themselves fortunate that their losses in the whole operation were no more than three killed and 35 wounded.

General Hakewill Smith was much pleased by the speed with which the 156th Brigade had dealt with Alpon. In a letter to Brigadier C. N. Barclay, D.S.O., he said: "The capture of the town itself by the 4/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers was a very fine and neat piece of work. I know that the issue hung in the balance for some time and it was only the determination of the men and the skill of the officers and non-commissioned officers that turned the scale."

When the Division reached the Rhine, the immediate awards in the Scots Fusiliers for "Operation Blackcock" were announced: The Victoria Cross to Fusilier D. Donnini; the Distinguished Service Order to Lieutenant-Colonel A. N. Gosselin, O.B.E.; the Military Cross to Captain A. W. Macdonald; and the Military Medal to Sergeants H. Bennet and W. Sargenson, and to Fusilier A. S. Wilson.

6th Bn

As a result of the postponement of the Rhine campaign caused by the German advance through the Ardennes, the I 5th (Scottish) Division found itself at this time on the banks of the Maas, with the 6th Scots Fusiliers in rest centres in Blerick and further west. The weather was bitterly cold, with snow deep on the ground. The Battalion lived in farmhouses, and occasionally in dug-outs. Large drafts arrived from the Green Howards and Irish Fusiliers, and "C" Company, which had been broken up, was now reconstituted. A detachment for commando-type work, known as the "phantom group ", was formed under command of Sergeant Rees. It was heavily armed and lived apart in billets of its own. During this period of quiet Field-Marshal Montgomery held an investiture at 15th Divisional Headquarters in Zomeron, in which the Royal Scots Fusiliers participated. The Distinguished Service Order was awarded to Lieutenant-Colonel

I. Mackenzie; the Military Cross to Major H. M. Gow; the Distinguished Conduct Medal to Sergeant Rees; and the Military Medal to Sergeants Curran and Beagan and to Corporals McCarthy and Bell.

The 6th Bn was now involved in “Operation Veritable “, northward of the scene of the 4/5th Battalion’s exploits at Lind and Stein and at Alpon. The 15th Division, with two other British divisions, the 51st and the 53rd, and the Canadians, was attacking the Reichswald in order to crack the forward defences of the Rhine. The breach of the Roer dams by the Germans had made a morass of the British battleground up to the Rhine. The floods, combined with a thaw after hard frost, and the constricted nature of the front between the Maas and the Rhine south-east of Nijmegen made the advance a costly operation, in spite of powerful armament. The 51st Division on the right of the assault was to break through the Reichswald Forest to Gennep and eastwards towards Goch; the 53rd was to clear the great forest itself; and the 15th in the left centre was to break through the strip between the Reichswald and the low country south of the Rhine, now temporarily flooded, and press on to Cleve and Adem. The 46th and 227th Brigades were to destroy the outpost line where most of the enemy defences were concentrated. The Fusiliers, as part of 44th Brigade, were to penetrate the main Siegfried Line by night, using an armoured breaching force.

I

6th Bn: *The Siegfried Line*

The northern extremity of the Siegfried Line followed the Maas from Roermond to the neighbourhood of Geldern before it turned north to the heavily protected town of Goch. Here it crossed north-westwards over the river Niers, climbing the high ground in the heart of the Reichswald north of Hekkens, and ended on the road from Nijmegen to Cleve in the vicinity of Tuthees, where an anti-tank ditch connected the gap between forest and road. To the powerful structure of pre-war concrete works in the Line the German engineers had added intricate field works. Subsidiary trench systems existed at Frasselt, Nutterden, Donsbreuggen, Materborn and Cleve, which provided additional depth to the defence. There was also a switch line which ran from Goch to Cleve in rear of the Reichswald to ensure all-round protection, and further east a third zone of parallel trenches known as” the Hochwald lay-back “had been prepared.

Deception was the keynote for the operation and everything possible was done to mislead the Germans. All movement was by night. Sham billeting parties moved out to places due north on the lower Maas, to give the impression that the forthcoming attack would be from that area. Every vehicle was fitted fore and aft with small canvas blinds which hid the divisional markings. Items of misleading information were mentioned casually in the hearing of civilians, and occasional slips of paper inscribed with deceptive place names such as Utrecht or Rotterdam were left where they would be found. On the morning of February 4 General Horrocks, commanding XXX Corps, told all officers of the 15th Division of the Corps’ part in the forthcoming operation; but the briefing of junior ranks was postponed until the day before the event.

Meanwhile intensive training took place, with infantry acting in co-operation with a variety of special armoured equipment, including “flails “, “kangaroos ~“, “crocodiles “, searchlight tanks and “buffaloes “. On this occasion the Battalion was to go into action supported by “flails” and “crocodiles “, by armoured bulldozers, and by tanks specially equipped to fire outsize explosive

charges which were calculated to pulverise any concrete emplacements which might impede the advance. Colonel Mackenzie now went on leave and Major H. W. P. Harrison assumed command of the Battalion, while Major H. M. Gow became Second-in-Command.

On February 6 at 4 p.m. the Battalion left for Nijmegen. The transport travelled in close order, with 40 yards between vehicles. Only the leading vehicle in the column showed front lights; elsewhere side-lights only were used: and only the rear-most vehicle showed a tail-light; the intervening vehicles had rear axle lighting only. Speed was limited to 10 miles in the hour in accordance with a timetable which should result in arrival at Nijmegen before daylight, so that all could be still and in concealment before any enemy reconnaissance aircraft came over to take photographs. The Battalion convoy crossed the suspension bridge over the Maas, picked up its guides in Nijmegen, and was soon lodged complete in a large school.

The weather was now causing concern, as after a quick thaw rain had fallen and everywhere the ground had become waterlogged. Only two roads led from Nijmegen to the start line, and on such a narrow front a bottleneck could easily be created, as almost all the vehicles were tracked. For the whole of February 7 the Fusiliers lay up in the school, and also for the following night, during which waves of Allied bombers passed over for a preliminary bombardment of Cleve and Goch, the two nearest towns in Germany. Cleve was 12 miles away by air, and Goch about 15 miles.

At 5 a.m. on February 8 a barrage opened which was heavier than that at Alamein or any in Normandy. A thousand guns fired for five hours on a four-mile front.

“H-hour” for the 44th Brigade was at 9 p.m., but at that time its Battalions were still in Nijmegen, trying to shelter from the rain in their “kangaroo” personnel carriers. The roads to the start line were in a very bad state and imposed such delay that the battle plan had to be changed and adjusted to meet the circumstances. Finally, at 4 a.m. on February 9, the King’s Own Scottish Borderers crossed the start line alone. Enemy opposition was slight, and as it was impossible for the Scots Fusiliers to be brought forward the K.O.S.B. went ahead and were able to complete their own and the Fusiliers’ tasks before daybreak. The Fusiliers followed them, taking 23 prisoners. They then spent a fairly quiet night in the area of the Wolfsberg, finding such cover as they could to shelter from occasional enemy fire and visits from enemy aircraft.

6th Bn: The capture of Cleve

At 1 p.m. on February 10 the Fusiliers were ordered to clear the Steinberg, a densely wooded hump-backed hill standing to westward of the north-west outskirts of Cleve. It was bounded to north and south by the only two roads from Nijmegen to Cleve, and afforded an excellent position from which to cover both those roads and also Cleve itself, which had already been probed by patrols of the 5th Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment. At the Wolfsberg the Fusiliers were to the south of the two roads, and before going on to clear the Steinberg they had first to deal with a small conical hill, the Cleverberg. Near the top of this feature stood a high wooden look-out tower, which served as a valuable observation post for the enemy. Late in the afternoon Major Hunter led forward a small force consisting of two sections of carriers, two “wasp” flame-throwers, a section of mortars and a detachment of anti-tank guns. On approaching the Cleverberg they came under heavy machine gun fire. Major Hunter ordered the men of the carrier sections to dismount and led them in an attack from the southwest supported by the”

wasps “. It was almost dark when they made their assault, firing every available weapon to give an impression of greater strength. Several enemy trenches were overrun and the occupants captured, but as machine guns were still firing from the tower, the “wasps” went into action and set the wooden building alight; whereupon the Germans holding it surrendered. Unfortunately, while leading his men in the action round the tower, Major Hunter was mortally wounded. Captain Sullivan, commanding the carrier platoon, took over.

The success of this attack enabled the rest of the Battalion to deal with the Steinberg. This hill was crossed by a number of ridges, one of which, running from south to north, was chosen as the axis for the first phase of the attack. “D” Company led the advance to the north edge and there dug in, while “A”, “B” and “C” Companies took up positions extending across the neck of the woods. Only minor opposition was encountered.

The second phase of the operation was launched at first light on February ii. All companies turned eastwards and advanced to the edge of the Steinberg. The advance was successful, but confusion arose as Battalions of the 22 7th Brigade came eastwards through the wood behind the Fusiliers, discovering hidden parties of enemy as they moved forward. They acted, in fact, as beaters for the Fusiliers, and “C” and “D” Companies were provided with excellent targets and took many prisoners. “A” and “D” Companies eventually consolidated positions they had reached at the eastern edge of the Steinberg, while “B” and “C” were placed under command of the King’s Own Scottish Borderers, who were now pressing forward towards Cleve. Meanwhile the Cleverberg became the scene of renewed fighting as the Germans filtered back through the woods and surrounded the charred watch-tower, firing with small arms, automatic weapons, and at least one bazooka, which hit a 6th Bn carrier. The Fusiliers’ anti-tank platoon assumed an infantry role, and Churchill tanks of the Grenadier Guards engaged the enemy with their machine guns. The Germans then raised a white flag, and one officer and 35 other ranks were made prisoners.

The 43rd Division made its way into Cleve from the southwest. It was followed next day by the Fusiliers, who had spent the night in the vicinity of the much disputed watch-tower. They occupied such houses as were partly habitable and remained there for six days, resting and refitting. The delivery of supplies was precarious, as the flood from the Roer dams had submerged the main rearward road to Nijmegen, which was under several feet of water at Brannenbergh, so that only amphibious vehicles or boats could make the journey. The 6th Bn Quartermaster sailed in a D.U.K.W. daily, bringing supplies up to Cleve from the base at Nijmegen.

6th Bn: *Gogh*

On February .18 the Battalion left for Goch, an important road centre and fortress town eight miles to the south of Cleve, passing through part of the 43rd Division, which was by now established on a high escarpment overlooking the fortress. The 51st Division, at the same time, was approaching the place from the west. The capture of Goch was necessary to open up communications towards the Rhine. The town was roughly bisected from east to west by the River Niers, most of it lying on the north side of the river, well fortified with anti-tank ditches and strong-points. A reconnaissance by the Royal Scots established that Goch was strongly held by

troops of the German 2nd, 7th and 8th Parachute Divisions, with elements of the 180th and 109th Infantry Divisions.

The Royal Scots and King's Own Scottish Borderers were to carry out the attack, while the Royal Scots Fusiliers were to pass through and clear the town. The assaulting Battalions met stiff resistance and had great difficulty in crossing the anti-tank ditch, with the result that the Scots Fusiliers were unable to pass through but had to remain strung out along the side of the approach road, where they were under mortar and shell fire for most of the night. Early next morning they moved forward to the river bank about the middle of the town. During a period of particularly heavy enemy shelling Major Harrison, the acting commanding officer, was wounded in the arm. Captain Turner, who was with him at the time, took over command until Major Gow arrived from Battalion Headquarters.

"B" and "C" Companies reached their objectives in the face of sporadic small arms fire and heavy mortar fire. "A" Company too was successful, and was closely followed by "D" Company. The Battalion spent the rest of February 19 in consolidating and clearing the position. During the night, however, the phantom group "patrolled the entire sector, search for enemy and taking many prisoners. Meanwhile the 51st Division was entering Goch from the west bank of the river, across the Fusiliers' front, and its arrival had the effect of reducing the volume of enemy fire directed at the 44th Brigade positions. Late on February 19 "A" Company had made touch with the 7th Black Watch across a partially blown bridge, and so established a link between the 44th Brigade and the 51st Division. The enemy had been forced into the southeast side of the town. Artillery and mortar fire remained heavy throughout the next day while the town was cleared north of the river.

Forward near Schloss Calbeck, in the wooded country north of Goch, a vital bridge was secured intact on the only firm route for tanks over the marshes. Information obtained from prisoners that the Germans had been strongly reinforced by paratroops led to a change in plan. As a result the Fusiliers were relieved on February 21 in Goch by the 2nd Monmouth's of the 53rd Division, placed under command of the 227th Brigade and moved to a wooded area about Schloss Calbeck, where they had a short spell of bitter fighting, and were heavily shelled as the Germans fell back towards their artillery. The Fusiliers also suffered many casualties in their attempts to take some wooded high ground overlooking Weeze, in preparation for an assault by the 53rd Division in a southward direction from Goch. Survivors have made particular mention of the heavy shelling, described by many as the worst in their experience; but for two days units of the 44th Brigade held their salient until the 53rd Division launched its attack. Eventually, on February 25, the Scots Fusiliers and other units of the 44th Brigade were relieved by the 8th Brigade of the 3rd Division and moved back to Turnhout.

For a time the 15th Division reverted to XII Corps, and returned to the Maas to prepare for the crossing of the Rhine. Here there was an immense build-up of stores and ammunition. Field-Marshal Montgomery's plan was for the Ninth United States Army on the right, and the Second British Army on the left, to cross the Rhine between Rheinberg and Rees, with Wesel as the initial objective. The aim was to obtain a bridgehead of sufficient depth to provide forming-up areas for the main drive to the east and north-east. The attack of the Second Army was to be delivered by XXX Corps on the right and XII Corps on the left. XII Corps chose as its striking force the 15th (Scottish) Division, with the 44th and 227th Brigades leading the assault.

Lieutenant-General Martin, the historian of the 15th Division, states:

“When all was ready the XII Corps’ night assault, ‘Operation Plunder ‘,was to be delivered through the 52nd (Lowland) Division, already up to the Rhine, by the 1st Commando Brigade on the right directed against Wesel and by the 15th Division on the left directed on Bislich and Mehr, while XXX Corps’ night assault was to be delivered by the 51st Division on Rees. At the same time the Ninth United States Army would cross further up-stream at Rheinberg.

“Next day the XVIII United States Airborne Corps, with the 17th United States Airborne Division on the right, and on the left the 6th British Airborne Division, would land on the 15th Division’s front in the area of the Diersfordter Walk and Hamminkein, to silence the enemy’s guns and to secure the crossings over the Ijssel.

“During the rehearsal for the Rhine crossing carried out on the banks of the Maas, the 15th Division had under command (as in the crossing) the 4th Armoured Brigade, of which the 44th Royal Tanks were equipped with Shermans fitted with devices enabling them to swim under their own power; the 11th Army Group, R.E.; a self-propelled anti-tank battery; and a ‘Bank’ group to control traffic and troops across the river. There were also in operation the lethal ‘funnies’ of 33rd Armoured Brigade, besides the ‘flails’, ‘crocodiles’ and ‘kangaroos’ and two regiments of the 11th Royal Tanks, as well as the East Riding Yeomanry, equipped with ‘buffaloes’ The 11th Royal Tanks were to lift the 44th Brigade and the East Riding Yeomanry the 227th.

“The date of the crossing was fixed for March 23.”

Chapter XV

THE 11th BATTALION IN HOLLAND AND ON "THE ISLAND", 1944-1946

*Into Holland—"The Island"—Amphibious operations in
the floods—A water-borne raid—Goodbye to "The Island"
—Occupation duties and disbandment*

11th BATTALION

WHILE the 4/5th Battalion was forcing its way through the polder of Walcheren and the 6th Bn was fighting at Blerick on the Maas, the 11th Battalion, with the 49th Division, was also taking part in the eastward advance and was at that time operating on the borders of Holland after the dissolution of Eykynforce on October 2.

11th BATTALION *Into Holland*

For five days the 11th Royal Scots Fusiliers occupied a defensive position at Zondereigen, close to the Dutch border, guarding the left flank of the Polish Armoured Division, which was moving northwards. On the afternoon of October 3 "D" Company, with eight Sherman tanks and a section of carriers and of mortars under command, crossed the border on an armed reconnaissance. Ten prisoners were taken, and the tanks withdrew at dusk while the Company formed a close box and remained as a standing patrol throughout the night, withdrawing next morning without opposition. Lieutenant Murray had a lucky escape at about this time, when a haystack which he was using as an observation post was shot from under him by an 88-millimetre shell. Among the outstanding minor actions in a period of much activity was a daylight patrol led by Lieutenant McIntosh, which killed at least 10 Germans and wounded more, yet managed to return unscathed. After a week on the defensive in Maerle the Fusiliers withdrew westwards to Oostmalle. On the afternoon of October 21 patrols were sent north of the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal and reached Wuestwezel. During the night a small enemy patrol reached "A" Company's lines, but having lost five men killed and three captured the surviving Germans disappeared into the darkness. The Fusiliers then moved to a position north of Wuestwezel to reinforce the 1st Leicesters, who had been counter-attacked by infantry with tanks. On October 23 the enemy launched an attack with infantry and self-propelled guns against a platoon of "D" Company and the carrier platoon which were holding Kruisweg, and one of the mobile guns actually entered the village and got behind the Fusiliers' lines. Sergeant Little of "D" Company is described in the records as having been "magnificent" in this emergency. Two anti-tank guns of the Royal Artillery which were in the area had been put out of action, one by a direct hit, while the other was immobilised in a burning house. Displaying great courage and coolness, Sergeant Little got this gun out of the house with the help of others in his platoon, dragged it into a firing position

and knocked out the enemy gun. The enemy withdrew in the early afternoon under threat of counter-attack by a Battalion of the Hallams.

Troops of the 104 (Timberwolf) United States Division relieved the Fusiliers on October 25. The Battalion moved to Uisschenheaven, where it stayed for three days. It then moved under command of "Clarkeforce" into Holland to take the village of Wouw and cut the main road from Roosendaal to Bergen-Op-Zoom. During the night a patrol of "C" Company under Lieutenant Gillespie reached the outskirts of Wouw. Next morning the Battalion, supported by tanks, attacked and was soon astride the road between Wouw and Bergen-Op Zoom. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Eykyn, went ahead into Wouw to direct the evacuation of the town. There he discovered a German self-propelled gun with its team, which he attempted to take unawares and capture, but without success. The town was then cleared by a select force consisting of Brigadier Clarke, Lieutenant-Colonel Eykyn and Captain Leslie, the Battalion Intelligence Officer. After occupying Wouw, the Battalion moved back to the area of Brembosch in order to concentrate and prepare under cover of darkness for an encircling attack to take Roosendaal from the south. The Battalion attacked with tank support on October 30. Colonel Eykyn went ahead, intending to meet the advancing companies on the outskirts of the town, but finding the enemy gone he passed right through the place, so that he and his Intelligence Officer with their carrier crew were the first Allied troops in Roosendaal, and the attacking companies arrived to find this unorthodox advanced guard already comfortably installed in billets. The previous day's fighting had cost the Battalion three officers wounded: Captain I. A. H. Mackenzie, Captain P. G. Dixon and Lieutenant H. E. Thomson. A two-day operation followed the occupation of Roosendaal, memorable chiefly for appalling conditions of freezing cold and wet. One platoon had to spend nearly five hours waist deep in water.

The Germans had left rearguards to the north of Roosendaal. The Fusiliers were at an hour's notice from 7 a.m. on November 4, and during a wait in a concentration area at Oud Gastel harassing fire from 42-inch mortars and medium machine guns was directed onto the enemy positions. At 10.30 a.m. there were reports of a German withdrawal and the Battalion moved forward, with "B" Company right, "D" Company left, and "C" and "A" Companies following up on right and left respectively. The leading troops reached the first report line unopposed and went on until "B", "C" and "D" Companies made contact with the enemy and came under fire. All movement was restricted to the tops of the dykes which stood clear of the waterlogged ground; to advance, side-step or withdraw to allow for close artillery support was quite impracticable. The Germans were well dug-in and concealed, and they allowed the Fusiliers to get so close that artillery support was out of the question. "B" Company was pinned down in open country; night was coming on and further action was impossible. "C" Company of the 7th Duke of Wellington's Regiment was placed under command of the Battalion, and positions were consolidated for the night. The enemy withdrew further under cover of darkness. On the morning of November 5 "D" Company's patrols met patrols of the Canadian forces advancing from the south. A patrol of "B" Company reached the village of Dinterloord, where it was mistakenly attacked by Spitfires, fortunately without loss. At 10.25 a.m. Canadian forces entered Dinterloord and the Battalion was ordered to withdraw to Roosendaal, leaving "A" Company to hold a covering position until dusk, when it was relieved and rejoined the Battalion. On November 8 the Fusiliers moved to Soerendonk, where they rested until passing on to Egchelhoek in preparation for an attack on Venlo. They were not, however, committed to that operation but moved instead to Nijmegen.

11th BATTALION: *"The Island"*

Although the 11th Royal Scots Fusiliers was the only one of the four Battalions of the Regiment fighting in 21 Army Group which did not penetrate into Germany, it took part in the fighting on "The Island" and at Arnhem in April 1945. Those events are dealt with in this chapter, which continues the record of the 11th Battalion to the time of its disbandment.

In an address which he made before the unveiling at Groesbeek of a memorial to the men of the Commonwealth who fell during the advance from the River Seine through the Low Countries towards Germany, Lieutenant-General Sir Brian Horrocks remarked that when he enquired of soldiers which was their worst experience in North West Europe, they frequently referred to "The Island", the sector which lay beside the great bridge at Nijmegen. The 11th Battalion was greeted on arrival in this unpleasant area by two hours of heavy bombardment, the prelude to an enemy night attack on December 3/4, aimed at the right sector of the Brigade front. Major A. L. Rowell, who commanded "D" Company, had been briefed previously for a counter-attack role to meet such an emergency. His report on the action was as follows:

"At about ~ a.m. the Company was ordered to "stand to", and later ordered to move and to begin the task at first light, 7.30 a.m. It was thought that the enemy, approximately 200 strong, had penetrated the main street of Haalderen, although their exact locations were unknown, and that they were holding houses on either side of the street, running from the south-east. Platoons of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment at two locations were thought to be surrounded, possibly wiped out, and 'D' Company cookhouse of the D.W.R. was known to be held by the enemy, but it was retaken by the Regiment on the arrival of the Fusiliers.

"To prevent a clash between the Fusiliers and the Duke of Wellington's in the first phase, I planned to clear all houses on the right-hand side of the street as far as a road junction with the Fusiliers' 17 Platoon, sending 18 Platoon up the left-hand side as soon as the situation in the houses opposite 'A' Company headquarters of the D.W.R. was established. Sergeant Little was in reserve with the Fusiliers' 16 Platoon in fire positions protecting the D.W.R. Headquarters.

"By the time the Fusiliers' 17 Platoon had cleared the first house, troops of the Duke of Wellington's had arrived in the house opposite. So I sent 18 Platoon down the left-hand side of the street and the two platoons advanced, mutually supporting, to the first objective. Before reaching it, 18 Platoon came under fire but not heavy enough seriously to hinder progress. About 200 yards north-east of the road junction we found the remains of a platoon of the D.W.R. which reported that the enemy were believed to be in houses in the area of the road junction. 18 Platoon succeeded in reaching the houses on either side of the road junction. No enemy was found, but fire was opened on the platoon from houses elsewhere.

"In the final phase, the clearing of all houses on the northeast side of the street, 16 Platoon attacked, with covering fire from 17 and 18 Platoons. Spasmodic small arms fire came from the objective, but when the second house was reached the enemy immediately surrendered and a large party of prisoners was taken. A Duke of Wellington's platoon, which had been surrounded, laid smoke for the advance on the final houses and 17 Platoon of the Fusiliers consolidated on either side. More prisoners were taken and, of their own accord, two Germans came out of their positions. In all 77 prisoners were taken for the loss of one other rank killed and two wounded."

At about 3.15 a.m. a reorganised platoon of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment took over and "D" Company of the Scots Fusiliers moved back. "C" Company moved up into the area in the evening, relieving "D" Company and reinforcing the Duke of Wellington's.

11th BATTALION: *Amphibious operations in the floods*

On 6th December the Fusiliers took over a sector of the front at Haalderen. It was an unpleasant area, the scene of "D" Company's battle two days before, in which extensive inundations by the enemy had left most of the surroundings under water. The Battalion remained there for 10 days, patrolling, clearing and ditching roads, until relieved on December 16 by the 1st Leicesters, when it moved back to Bemmelen. "D" Company, which was resting in Nijmegen until December 20, came under command of a mixed force guarding the bridge across the Waal. Next day the remainder of the Fusiliers moved to Ressen, a reserve area, and came under direct command of Divisional Headquarters for use in a counter-attack role anywhere on the divisional front. Christmas was spent there quietly, with some expectation that New Year would be more fittingly observed. On December 27 the Fusiliers were relieved and moved back to Nijmegen into private billets. "New Year's Day 1945", according to the records, "was spent in a most appropriate manner."

The new year began with training and preparations for a move on January 6 to take over the left sector on the Island. This move was part of the first phase of an operation to eliminate all German forces still between the Maas and the Rhine. The attack was not to begin until February 8. Meanwhile the Scots Fusiliers were helping to maintain the Nijmegen salient, with excursions deep into enemy territory which occasionally resulted in collisions with German outposts. On January 18 the enemy launched an attack on the defences adjoining the Fusiliers' left-hand sector. To cause a diversion "B" Company sent forward a strong fighting patrol, which went well up the Rhine, fired 40 Bren magazines and set a house on fire, but drew only light and inaccurate small arms fire. On January 21 the Battalion relieved the 1st Leicesters in the Zetten area. In front of them were three Battalions of the 56th Brigade which were withdrawing after counter-attacking and clearing the enemy from the area south of the Wetering Canal. Here the Fusiliers were left to hold a thinned-out position, dependent for support on tenuous telephone communications with which heavy snow was interfering.

Part of the offensive plan was to drive the enemy from the north bank of the Wetering Canal. It was known that the Germans were holding positions well back from the canal bank, which they controlled by means of standing patrols stationed in various buildings. Two tanks from a troop of the 6th Canadian Armoured Regiment, attached to the Scots Fusiliers, opened the attack by setting two of these buildings alight. "A" and "B" Companies, supported by tanks, then cleared the north end of Zetten. No enemy was found; however the Royal Engineers were called in to raze partly demolished buildings which seemed likely to be in use as enemy strong-points.

By February 8 the floods had risen so high that the Fusiliers had to be taken back the following day in craft towed by D.U.K.W's and in commandeered civilian boats. They returned again to Nijmegen at about the time that the main advance on the Rhine was pressing forward through the Reichswald. There they rested until February 24, when they were able to return to the Island as the floods had slightly receded. "A" Company headquarters was in the vicinity of

Haalderen behind an inundated area. For the reception of supplies at night the Fusiliers constructed a dock capable of berthing four assault craft, which ensured a quick turn-round. On the night of 6/7 March the Battalion took over from the Duke of Wellington's in Bommel, a quieter sector.

11th BATTALION: *A water-borne raid*

By this time enemy mines and wire in the Haalderen area had made effective patrolling difficult. It was therefore decided to try a new method of achieving the same purposes, by landing troops from the river well behind the enemy lines. It was hoped by this means to obtain prisoners for identification as well as inflicting casualties and causing confusion.

Early on March 10 "D" Company embarked at Nijmegen in four assault landing craft, intending to land some 1,200 yards behind the German lines. However, when still about 400 yards short of the objective the craft became visible to the enemy in the glare of searchlights in the sky further south, and machine guns opened fire from positions along the bund. Nevertheless 17 and 18 Platoons, which were in the first wave, touched down at about 5.45 a.m. at the exact spot planned; to be quickly followed by Company Headquarters and 16 Platoon. They came at once under fire from light mortars and grenades, but after a Spandau had been quickly silenced by Piat bombs 17 Platoon gained its objective, a white house standing on the bund.

The landing craft withdrew, taking with them five casualties and two prisoners, and in spite of more accurate enemy machine gun fire in the growing light, reached Nijmegen undamaged. Meanwhile 18 Platoon had passed through 17 Platoon, and without much trouble gained its first objective some 400 yards away, capturing one officer and two other ranks; and so secured the right flank.

16 Platoon had a more difficult task, which was complicated by the wounding of one of its section commanders on landing and soon afterwards by the loss of the platoon sergeant, Sergeant Little, M.M. Little had always shown a complete disregard for his own safety, and now his body was found beyond the first enemy strong-point further along the bund. The platoon had to clear six houses on the bund against fierce opposition, and when they reached the third house they came under machine gun fire from the fifth house. To overcome this, Lieutenant Douglas, M.C., the platoon commander, called for Artillery fire on the house. Corporal Miller then worked his way round behind the enemy machine gunner and killed him with Bren gun fire. On reaching the last house the platoon consolidated, while the pioneers taped a route through a suspected minefield which could be used as a line of withdrawal.

17 Platoon drove off two counter-attacks from their position at the white house, killing several of the enemy on each occasion; but the house ultimately caught fire, compelling the platoon to withdraw a short way along the bund. Later, the enemy reoccupied the house, whereupon it was accurately shelled by the artillery supporting the raid. About 20 of the enemy made their escape across an orchard. At least three were hit by fire from 18 Platoon, which at the same time was subjected to mortar fire, losing one Fusilier from a direct hit.

"D" Company was ordered to withdraw at about 8 a.m., and did so without incident. Its casualties were 3 killed and 8 wounded; the wounded were all safely evacuated. The German losses were 19 killed, 17 killed or wounded, and 10 prisoners. An account of the raid in the 92nd edition of the wartime publication *Current Reports from Overseas*, includes the following

comment: "A company action of this kind requires a very high standard of training and the plan, which was not a simple one, was obviously understood by all ranks." Congratulations on the outstanding success of this enterprise were received from both the Brigade Commander and the Divisional Commander, and the Company Commander, Major A. L. Rowell, was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his leading part in it.

On March 20, Lord Trenchard, Colonel of the Regiment, visited the Battalion and watched company training.

11th BATTALION *Goodbye to "The Island"*

The operation of clearing the Germans out of the eastern end of The Island began on April 1. The Fusiliers moved to a concentration area in Lent. The Battalion record states: "At long last it seemed that we were to be rid of this depressing area which, through no choice of ours, had been our hunting ground for four months. The attack went in at 6 a.m. on April 2, the Duke of Wellington's Regiment forcing the initial bridgehead. At zero hour we employed an artillery rocket projector which laid a mattress of 360 rockets each with the equivalent explosive charge of a 5.5-inch shell. The Battalion broke through at about 10 a.m., 'B' and 'C' Companies securing the flank, 'A' and 'D' Companies going through to the final objectives. Relatively little resistance was encountered, even though the supporting tanks could not be used for some time as the roads in parts were badly cratered and in others lavishly sown with mines. The 146th Brigade passed through and the remainder of The Island was cleared on April 3."

The Battalion moved back again to Bemmelen, preparing for "Operation Anger", the capture of Arnhem; but there was a last minute change of plan. Arnhem was to be taken from the east and a different brigade was to be committed in the initial stages. Accordingly the Fusiliers crossed the IJssel, settled in Duiven and began work on the new plan.

On April 12, the day of the attack, the leading brigade got a firm foothold in the south-eastern quarter of Arnhem. "Our Battalion", states the record, "followed up on April 14, broke through the bridgehead and cleared the way to the north-west suburbs of Arnhem. Offensive patrolling and heavy accurate 'stonking' of likely positions brought in a considerable number of the enemy, many of them youngsters who had little training. On one occasion the enemy resorted to one of his underhand tricks and four men came down the road waving a white flag. The sentry of the forward section came out of cover to beckon them

in. The Germans immediately dropped the flag, while fire opened up from concealed positions. We had taken precautions and our Bren opened up and shot down the four men."

The Fusiliers next moved north-westwards to Ede, half-way between Arnhem and Amersfoort, supported by tanks. They haroured in an area some 4,000 yards short of the town and formed into three concentric circles of infantry, tanks, and soft-skinned vehicles, preparatory to attacking Ede at dawn on April 17. "A" Company captured some high ground, a key position on the left flank in the outskirts of the town. Two squadrons of tanks deployed on the right into wooded country, and were closely followed by "B", "C" and "D" Companies onto their objectives. That night the Battalion entered Ede without incident and again moved north-westwards to Lunten, a delightful Dutch village which was quite undamaged. Here the Fusiliers parted from their anti-tank guns, which could now be held in reserve within the Brigade group, as

there were no longer any German tanks in the area. The retreating Germans were behind the Grebbe Line and the Fusiliers followed them as far as a position short of Scherpenzeel.

11TH BATTALION: *Occupation duties and disbandment*

The Battalion was at Scherpenzeel on May 5 1945, when news was received that the Germans in North West Europe had surrendered. The 49th Division was allotted an area of occupation 30 miles wide, running due north and south from the IJsselmeer to the Waal, which included the towns of Hilversum, Utrecht and Amersfoort.

On May 18 the Fusiliers handed over to the Highland Light Infantry of Canada, which at that time contained two complete rifle companies belonging to the Royal Scots Fusiliers of Canada, one of the Regiment's Commonwealth affiliations, and moved back to Lunteren. On May 21 they took part in a victory parade at the Hague, at which the salute was taken by Prince Bernhard and General Crerar; and then passed on to Osnabruck on their way to permanent occupation duties at Ludenscheid, south of the Rhur. Lieutenant-Colonel P. S. Sandilands, D.S.O., succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel Eykyn, D.S.O., as Commanding Officer early in November 1945.

In April In April 1946 the Battalion handed over to Belgian troops at Ludenscheid and moved to Erwitte, between Soest and Paderborne. At Truppenubungplatz, near Paderborn, the 11th Battalion relieved the 2nd Bn and the 4/5th Battalion which were jointly guarding a civilian internment camp. This meeting of the three battalions was an unique event in the history of the Regiment, and photographs were taken to commemorate the occasion. The respective commanding officers at the time were Lieutenant-Colonel J. L. Maxwell, D.S.O. (2nd Bn), Lieutenant-Colonel M. R. J. Hope Thomson, D.S.O., M.C. (4/5th Battalion), and Lieutenant-Colonel P. S. Sandilands, D.S.O. (11th Battalion).

The 11th Battalion was disbanded at Paderborn in November 1946, and the majority of the rank and file were posted to the 2nd Bn.

Chapter XVI

THE RHINE AND AFTER, 1945

2nd Bn: *Recuperation in the Middle East, '944—The advance to the Elbe*

4/5th BATTALION: *The Dortmund-Ems Canal*

6th Bn: *Over the Rhine—The crossing oldie Ijssel*

2nd Bn: Recuperation in the Middle East, 1944

THE 2nd Bn was last mentioned in a previous chapter when it sailed for Egypt from Taranto in Italy in 5944 in H.M.T. *Banifora*. It reached Port Said on July 9, re-equipped at Helwan, and a week later moved to an encampment on the old battleground of Gaza in Palestine. There the strength of the Battalion was increased by a draft of six officers and 220 men from anti-aircraft and other artillery units which were being disbanded because they were no longer necessary in that theatre. The opportunity of taking leave to visit Beirut provided a special attraction during the Battalion's stay at Gaza.

Their next move on August 7 took the Fusiliers to Syria, where they occupied a former mule camp at Djaidje in the Bekaa valley, not far from Baalbek. The writer may be allowed to include a personal reminiscence here. While the 2nd Bn under Colonel MacInnes was in camp in the

neighbourhood of Damascus in 5943, as has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, he had been able to pay them a visit, accompanied by Brigadier A. D. G. Orr, D.S.O. In this summer of 1944, he was again able to visit the Battalion in its camp in the Bekaa valley, where he spent a day with Colonel Maxwell and met many old friends among the officers, warrant officers and sergeants. In the hot, dusty summer, bathing at night in the little stream that ran through the camp was a luxury.

At Djeidje infantry training was maintained at high pressure, with a strong emphasis on physical fitness. At the beginning of September there were combined exercises with tanks of Hodson's Horse from the 31st Independent Armoured Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel L. E. L. Maxwell, brother of Lieutenant-Colonel J. L. Maxwell. At the end of a fortnight, during which there was great expenditure of live ammunition, each company took part in an attack on a feature known as The Monument. This exercise was so realistic that neighbouring Arabs departed from their villages to Turkey, so it was said, "for the duration". Two Arabs were blown up while trying to steal the target sheets of corrugated iron, which had been booby-trapped by the pioneers. A baptism with Bren gun bullets of the limousine of a distinguished Turk marked the climax of this exhilarating exercise, and almost caused an international incident. A more serious accident occurred during training, when the unexpected explosion of a 69 grenade wounded Lieutenant Biden. Biden, famous for his one-man patrol up the mountain at Alfadena, was among the last of the original South African officers who had joined the Battalion in Sicily from Prince Alfred's Guard, the regiment of the Union affiliated to the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

At the end of the month the whole of the 57th Brigade marched southwards for six days to the sea near Sidon in Palestine. They rested on Sunday at Merjayoun where the Very Rev. J. Hutchison Cockburn, D.D., a former Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, conducted a religious service and brought greetings from home. On October 3, the final day of the march, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in the Middle East watched the Battalion pass by, and commented on its fitness and high marching standard.

A camp at Pardes Hanna, midway between Tel Aviv and Haifa, was the Fusiliers' next station. The camp was still in course of construction, and a long, unfruitful wrangle with the builders to secure completion of the contract lasted throughout a stay of five months. A succession of brigade and Battalion exercises was carried out over the bleak hillsides of Palestine. Between periods of training members of the Battalion learned to play skittles in the officers' mess, and Captain Jones, by profession a classics master, conducted expeditions to Caesarea.

The provision of a guard of honour to mark the arrival of the new High Commissioner for Palestine, Lord Gort, was beset by such irksome problems as a shortage of glengarries. However, it is on record that at the ceremony, which took place on October 35, "the guard was magnificent." Major Northcott,

M.C., was in command; Lieutenant Devine, M.C., and Lieutenant Coutts, M.C., were the subalterns; and 100 noncommissioned officers and men, with the pipes and drums, were on parade. Lord Gort recognised in the guard several veterans of Dunkirk who had been under his command. The Divisional Commander, Major-General Gregson-Ellis, who had been with the Battalion at Anzio, left the 5th Division at Pardes Hanna.

Towards the middle of January the date of the Battalion's departure from Palestine was announced as some time in February. An advanced party set out for Italy, and it appeared that the Scots Fusiliers might be destined to rejoin the Eighth Army among the northern Apennines. The

Battalion was unlucky in having four men, including the redoubtable Quartermaster's batman, Fusilier Hunter, killed by the overturning of a portee on the Haifa road. On a dull Sunday afternoon a signal was received that one officer and nine men could be sent on 28 days' leave to the United Kingdom, a notable event indeed after three years of war. It was decided to put the names of all those who had first gone overseas with the Battalion into a hat, and draw lots. The excitement was intense when the draw was made in an overcrowded canteen by Colonel Gordon, M.C., who was visiting the Battalion at the time. The pipes and drums played the Leave party on its way. The rest of the Battalion sailed from Haifa Bay on February 13 in H.M.T. *Andraspoera*, which oddly enough had the same Officer Commanding Troops and Ship's Adjutant who had travelled with the Battalion on its way to Madagascar in 1942.

When the Battalion reached Taranto again on February 17 it learned that Italy was not to be the end of its journey. A highly classified operation order, headed "Operation Goldflake", directed the 5th Division and two Canadian divisions to join the British Liberation Army (B.L.A.). In view of these instructions, the advanced party of the Scots Fusiliers, which had been engaged in taking over from the Duke of Wellington's Regiment at Perugia, was switched to Naples, whence it sailed for France and did not rejoin the Battalion until it reached Belgium. The rest of the Battalion waited at Bari for a fortnight in the snow before entraining in cattle trucks to travel across the waist of Italy to Salerno. There it embarked in the *Ville d'Oran*, accompanied by the 2nd Northamptonshires and some Canadian nursing sisters. After a stormy voyage the Fusiliers landed at Marseilles and went to the Marignane Transit Camp, where they spent several days of discomfort under canvas, in a bitter mistral wind. After three days of rail travel through France they reached Sottengem in Belgium, whence they went on in trucks to Haaltert. "This was near our idea of paradise," says one account. "Not only were we all billeted in private houses, enjoying the luxury of comfortable beds for the first time for many a day, but our Belgian hosts did all in their power to make us feel at home." The introduction of seven days leave was also most popular.

To quote again: "For those for whom leave was delayed, life in Belgium almost made up for the disappointment. The Belgian families took us to their hearts. With their usual genius for getting the best out of people, the 'Jocks' soon became part of the family circle. The pipes and drums played in all the villages in which we were billeted and were always mobbed. Drum-Major Guthrie became the leading figure in the town next to the burgomaster; and several football matches sealed the friendships."

The Battalion expressed its gratitude by arranging a party for the children of the neighbourhood. It catered for 500 of these youngsters, but over 1,000 appeared. War conditions limited the scope of the entertainment, but its main feature was a trip round the town in jeeps, carriers and dingoes. "The evident delight of the children", the account observes, "was equalled in its intensity only by the long-suffering expression on the faces of the drivers as they rescued yet another brat from beneath the wheels. The star-piece of the entertainment was an Irish jig danced by Father Bluett."

A feeling of general expectancy was now heightened by a visit from Field-Marshal Montgomery. The Battalion road and rail parties for the advance met at Goch, through which the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers had already passed with the 5th (Scottish) Division. The contrast with Belgium was sobering; the Germans were sullen and the order of "no fraternisation" was strictly enforced.

2nd Bn: *The advance to the Elbe*

Crossing the Rhine by the Xanten Bridge, the Scots Fusiliers went forward with the 7th Brigade. Final preparations lasting several days were made beyond the Rhine in pine woods at Rahden near Minden, and the journey was resumed on April 59 by way of Celle to Stederdorf; to the south-east of Uelzen. Next day the Battalion marched to the villages of Stocken and Reistadt to relieve the 9th Parachute Battalion and the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion of the 6th Airborne Division. This was the forward concentration area, and as the situation was uncertain, the Fusiliers dug themselves in for all round defence. Uelzen had been captured a few days earlier by the 5th Division after a sharp fight, from which the Germans had disengaged towards the north-east and had not yet been accurately located.

The Divisional task was to move to the Elbe as rapidly as possible. The advance to the river was made on a two-brigade front, with the 17th Brigade on the right and the 13th Brigade on the left, and the 5th Reconnaissance Regiment acting initially as a forward screen. The 17th Brigade used two roads running in the direction of Neu Dachau. On the right the Scots Fusiliers were leading, followed by Brigade Headquarters and the 2nd Northamptonshires the 6th Seaforth were on the left. The 156th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, and the 38th Field Company, Royal Engineers, were in support. A squadron of the Grenadier Guards Armoured Regiment was allotted to the Fusiliers.

The 5th Division formed the right flank of 21st Army Group, and the Scots Fusiliers were thus on the right of the British line. An American division of the Ninth United States Army was intended to maintain the line unbroken to the south, but was not in position, so that the Fusiliers had an unprotected flank. There was a possibility that the few German tanks which had escaped the 15th Division at Uelzen, and had made off towards Dannenberg, might form the nucleus of a counter-attack on the part of enemy detachments lingering in the neighbourhood.

The movement eastward began at 6 a.m. on Saturday April 25 in weather which had deteriorated into unexpected rain and sleet. "A" Company, commanded by Captain Foss of the Union Defence Force, set out on the main axis, riding on the tanks of the Grenadiers in a bitterly cold wind. The rest of the Battalion followed with its essential transport, moving by bounds, with the guns of the anti-tank platoon, under command of Lieutenant Cope, interspersed throughout the column. "A" Company had to make a deviation to the right to avoid a bridge over a stream near Schwemlitz; although it had been restored overnight by the Royal Engineers, it was unfit to bear the weight of tanks. The Battalion was reunited near the village, where the road ran north-eastwards to the Forest of Ghorde. Meanwhile the squadron of the 5th Reconnaissance Regiment which was acting as a protective screen ahead, had been halted by 88-millimetre guns.

Some miles beyond Schwemlitz a wide, shallow valley led up to a low ridge on which stood the village of Hohenzeethen. In front of the village was a tangle of bush and scrub in which the Germans were entrenched, with their rearward positions in Hohenzeethen itself. Further to the east, the village of Bankowitz was also held by the enemy. "A" Company, with its tanks, was stopped by 88-millimetre shell and Spandau fire on the edge of a wood at the side of the Hohenzeethen road, and there took cover. However the tanks managed to manoeuvre into an enfilading position from which, hull down, they could bring harassing fire to bear on the German positions. "B" Company was despatched, with a troop of tanks, to deal with Bankowitz and come

in behind Hohenzeethen on the road running eastwards to Ziernien. "D" Company, under Captain Bowie, was sent into the open valley under cover of a smoke-screen provided by "R" (593) Battery and the Battalion mortars, to emerge from the left flank and assault Hohenzeethen village. The attack by Captain Bowie and his company was admirably planned and executed. Under cover of the haze of smoke they crossed the valley and reached a small wood not far from the enemy positions in the scrub. Thence Bowie led his men across 300 yards of flat fields and was amongst the Germans before they realised that they were being attacked. The Fusiliers swept on and seized the village, taking 40 prisoners, as well as five 88-millimetre guns and two 20-millimetre Vierlings (flak-guns) with no loss to the company. "A" Company in its stationary role, however, had an officer, Lieutenant R. Strang, and four Fusiliers slightly wounded by 88-millimetre gun fire. Some of the garrison escaped by the postern, for although "B" Company took Bankowitz, it suffered delays and just failed to cut the Hohenzeethen-Ziernien road in time to trap the retreating enemy.

The Scots Fusiliers now had to wait until the protective screen provided by the Reconnaissance Regiment was again in operation, and so did not resume the advance until 5 p.m. "A" Company, still leading, entered Ziernien, some miles further on. One of its tanks was struck by a discharge from a bazooka served by a civilian, who was duly dealt with. The village and an adjacent copse were cleared, and in the process "A" Company captured another 88-millimetre gun which had not come into action. The fringes of the Forest of Ghorde now lay ahead, and "C" Company took up the lead. By this time it was 6.30 p.m., the light was fading and the tanks were finding progress through the timber too difficult. By about 8.45 p.m. any further advance through the dark forest proved equally impracticable for infantry, and the Battalion was ordered to move back to the southern edge. Accordingly the Fusiliers withdrew and occupied two villages for the night, "A" and "B" Companies in Breese, and the remainder of the Battalion with the tanks in Riebrau, half a mile to the west. At 11 p.m. orders were issued for next day's advance and the Fusiliers ate their first hot meal since breakfast at 4 a.m. that morning. Sergeant Guthrie, the Provost Sergeant, painted the Divisional sign, "Y 67", in large characters on the end of a barn in Riebrau to register ownership. (This was still visible two years later.)

The Battalion re-entered the forest on Sunday morning, both tanks and infantry moving with caution. Some of the enemy were still in occupation, and two flak-guns which opened fire were captured. Company Sergeant-Major Carr, D.C.M., who had been with the Battalion for a long time, was wounded and evacuated. The Fusiliers probed carefully forward to the village of Ghorde, where a large German hospital was found filled with enemy wounded. It also contained a "Jock" of the 15th (Scottish) Division who was removed and taken back to his own people. Two miles further on the Fusiliers came upon Pommoissel, another of the forest villages, which lay in a clearing. Some 88-millimetre shells landed among the forward screen, and a tank was hit. The 56th Field Regiment went into action, and the anti-tank gunners of the Battalion demolished the church spire, which contained an enemy observation post. At mid-day "C" Company went into the village and took 70 prisoners, including some firemen who had been pressed into military service. The Battalion continued its advance, and by 3.30 in the afternoon was in the outskirts of Neu Dachau, on the west bank of the Elbe. The enemy were in position on a low, tree-covered ridge stretching across the front on the left of the highway, and in some fortified houses on the right. Some way beyond the houses rose a crescent of high ground, one horn of which dominated any line of approach. Below these heights lay a valley with a winding stream. "C" Company was

caught in the open and at once pinned down by 88-millimetre, flak and Spandau fire. There were immediate casualties, including the Company Commander, Major Williamson, and the Second-in-Command, Captain Moultrie, a South African Officer. As "C" Company had already lost Company Sergeant-Major Carr in the Forest of Ghorde that morning, Company Sergeant-Major Clancy took over command of the exposed platoon. Enemy fire was coming from the wooded ridge ahead, which was later named "Bazooka Wood", where dismounted flak guns in particular were unpleasantly active.

At 4.30 p.m. "D" Company was launched on a right-flanking attack, while "A" Company moved round on the opposite flank towards the heights beyond the stream. "B" Company was not then available; it had been acting as close escort to the guns during the passage of the Forest of Ghorde, and did not rejoin the Battalion until nightfall. The majority of "C" Company succeeded in crawling back from the highway, except for Clancy's platoon, which remained in position to shoot at any target that offered.

"D" Company again made good initial progress. "A" Company encountered some enemy concealed in a wood and was thus delayed, but later worked its way down to the edge of the village. Meanwhile "D" Company had found the going on the right very rough and was now out of touch. At 8 p.m., however, a message came that "D" Company was on the flank of Neu Dachau and would be ready to assault in 45 minutes. During the Company's approach to that position, which had been unobserved by the enemy, a platoon under Lance Sergeant Kelly had been dropped, which drove the Germans out of "Bazooka Wood". Five minutes before "D" Company's final assault the village was shelled by the 156th Field Regiment, which had now come forward. Houses were burning fiercely as the Fusiliers swept in on the surprised and unprepared garrison, which was driven from the village after some hard fighting in the streets. Captain Bowie was hit in the side, but happily the wound proved to be no more than a graze.

As soon as the success signal went up "A" Company moved in from its position short of the village to consolidate, while "D" Company reorganised under Lieutenant Moodie and Company Sergeant-Major McKue. A quick survey of Neu Dachau showed that the village was divided into two distinct parts by the valley of a stream running roughly east and west which had formed part of the outer defences. The two parts were joined by a causeway which spanned this little valley. Sounds made by tracked vehicles on the far side could be heard above the general clamour. Colonel Maxwell accompanied by Captain Foss and his own orderly, Fusilier Hallam, went to the near end of the causeway to make a reconnaissance. Just then two Germans came over the causeway with their hands up, but as the three Fusiliers went forward to seize them, four other Germans suddenly appeared over the edge of the causeway and opened fire. The reconnaissance party hurriedly withdrew.

"A" Company was then ordered to cross the causeway and occupy the further part of the village, which lay several hundred yards beyond the valley. It was met by bursts of fire from two Vierling guns mounted on half-tracked vehicles, which had possibly made the sounds heard earlier by the reconnaissance party. For about two minutes the occupied portion of the village was under heavy fire and more houses were set ablaze, including one next to "D" Company's headquarters. The Vierlings were then driven furiously across the causeway, through "A" Company and into the streets amongst the rest of the Battalion, firing continuously. They vanished into the darkness beyond the village and were seen no more. This incident caused some confusion, and both "D" and "A" Companies fell back clear of the houses, leaving only "D"

Company Headquarters and about 20 men under Company Sergeant-Major McKue, with the Colonel and Major Banes, who had just arrived with a patrol from "C" Company.

"Not knowing what else might emerge from the other part of the village", states Colonel Maxwell in a personal account of what followed, "Company Sergeant-Major McKue immediately organised his few men into a tight defensive perimeter around company headquarters and prepared to stay there till Doomsday, while Major Banes took his patrol and went round the whole of Neu Dachau. There was no sign of any further enemy activity.

"In the meantime, 'B' Company had been sent for and they came up to take over the defence of the village while 'A' and 'D' Companies reorganised. 'A' Company had suffered some casualties during the Vierling episode, including a very stout-hearted young officer, Lieutenant Logie, who was killed.

"There was no more anxiety that night."

The casualties during the advance to the Elbe had been comparatively light. The dead were Lieutenant Logie and three Fusiliers; four officers and 27 other ranks had been wounded. More than 100 German dead were counted. Two hundred prisoners were captured; also five 88-millimetre guns and many smaller weapons.

Next day, April 23, the Northamptonshires of the 17th Brigade cleared any pockets of enemy resistance on the left of the Scots Fusiliers, and subsequently assumed responsibility for holding Neu Dachau. The Fusiliers withdrew about one mile into reserve at Ventschau.

4/5th BATTALION

After its spell of fierce fighting among the woods and fields of Alpon, the 52nd Division was given the less exacting task of holding the west bank of the Rhine on a ten mile front from Buderich to Vynen.

The 156th Brigade moved into the area on March 18 to take over a sector of the line from the 157th Brigade. The 156th Brigade had now only one Cameronian Battalion, the 6th. In order to reduce the possibility of very heavy casualties falling upon one regiment, the 7th Cameronians had been transferred to the 157th Brigade and their place in the 156th had been taken by the 1st Glasgow Highlanders. It was the 7th Cameronians that the Scots Fusiliers now relieved at Buderich.

The crossing of the Rhine was now imminent and it became of first importance that the Germans should be kept in total ignorance of Allied intentions. The Battalion was warned that any Germans who succeeded in crossing the river must not return, and that constant vigilance should be maintained to prevent any attempt at an airborne reconnaissance by enemy paratroops. At night section posts were placed at intervals of 300 yards to forestall any reconnaissance by German patrols in boats. The weather before "D" "day was perfect and as hot as mid-summer. In the daytime men of Battalion Headquarters and the Support Company tended the cows, sheep, pigs and poultry which had been left behind by the local inhabitants when they were removed from the area.

It was anticipated that when the barrage opened on March 23, the eve of D day, the Allied positions west of the Rhine might come under heavy fire. The rifle companies were therefore withdrawn and dispersed about 1,000 yards from the river line. In the event this proved unnecessary, as the German response to the barrage was surprisingly mild. That evening the 4/5th

Battalion commander and his staff watched proceedings from an observation post in Gest. At 5.30 p.m. the town of Wesel was heavily bombed.

“It is a remarkable thing,” wrote Colonel Gosselin, “which I think shows the form of the Germans, that immediately the last bomb had fallen a Spandau opened up opposite ‘C’ Company. One would have thought nothing could have lived through it—yet prisoners stated that there were very few casualties. Except for the shelling of ‘A’ and ‘D’ Company areas, the night was uneventful. D day dawned without a cloud in the sky, and not a breath of wind. But the blast from the guns raised such a dust that it was not possible to see more than a few hundred yards. At 1030 hours we could only hear the first waves of the Airborne Corps passing over. By about 1045 hours, however, Dakotas were passing over our Headquarters on their way back, flying only a few hundred feet up, and at the same time we saw the gliders going in away to our left. It was a most impressive sight and I do not think anyone who saw it will ever forget it. With the landing of the Airborne Corps, shelling and mortaring in our area virtually ceased and within an incredibly short space of time, our Battalion area, from being very much front line, became lines of communication. Americans were everywhere, complete with all modern devices and in vehicles so big that one wondered how they ever got through the village streets. In less than 12 hours the first bridge was across the river, and in 24 hours there were at least three in our area. For the rest of our stay our task was still the same but with special emphasis on preventing ‘fishmen’ from coming up and damaging the bridges. By the time we left there were so many people on the river bank that it would have been quite impossible for anyone to emerge from the water.”

The Fusiliers’ task, after allowing elements of the 15th Division to pass through their lines on the west bank of the Rhine, was to follow on and exploit whatever success was achieved. The Glasgow Highlanders (now with the Scots Fusiliers in the 156th Brigade) crossed the Rhine in “buffaloes” to clear certain areas in Wesel on March 25. In the afternoon of the same day the 157th Brigade, under command of the 7th Armoured Division, was detailed to form the spearhead of the break-out. It made a fighting advance of 70 miles in six days across the Westphalian Plain to the River Ems. All bridges over the Ems had been blown, but units of the 157th Brigade crossed the river and occupied the key town of Rheine. The 155th Brigade were then given a mission further to the east with the 7th Armoured Division. Thus the 52nd Division was left with two of its infantry brigades, the 156th and the 157th, and an armoured brigade, the 4th, under command, for its forthcoming battle beyond Rheine and on the Dortmund-Ems Canal.

4/5th BATTALION: *The Dortmund-Ems Canal*

The enemy opposing the Division at this stage included elements of the Panzer Grenadiers, and of the 1st Gross Deutschland Regiment, which had been reinforced by candidates for non-commissioned rank from a training college near Hanover. The German lines lay in waterlogged country crossed by a maze of streams, dotted with woods and farmhouses and broken up by roads, fences and hedges. All had been woven into a powerful defensive system, upon which neither the rocket-firing Typhoons of the Royal Air Force nor the great weight of the British artillery appeared to make any impression. On April 4 the 7th Cameronians established a bridgehead to a depth of 150 yards beyond the canal, and this initial advantage was maintained by

the other Battalions of the 157th Brigade in a series of fierce engagements. On April 5 the 156th Brigade was brought up to support the 157th and to exploit the first limited gains.

The Fusiliers, after handing over their sector on the Rhine embankment to a Battalion of the Northamptonshires, concentrated in Menzelen and crossed the river by the Xanten Bridge to assemble in the vicinity of Loh. By April 3 they had reached Neuenkirchen in motor transport with the rest of the 156th Brigade, which was some miles behind the other brigades of the Division. Here Brigadier C. N. Barclay, C.B.E., D.S.O., left the Brigade for another appointment and was succeeded by Brigadier G. D. Renny, D.S.O., formerly of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, who had been commanding a brigade in the 3rd Division. The 156th Brigade reached the captured town of Rheine on the morning of April 5,, and at once became involved in operations in the bridgehead on the Dortmund-Ems Canal to the north-east. The 1st Glasgow Highlanders and 6th Cameronians drove the Germans back to Dreirwalde, and the whole brigade harboured in the town for the night, while the Royal Engineers worked to prepare a bridge at the north-west end to allow further exploitation. "All that night ", says the 4/5th Battalion account, "the stretcher-bearers were bringing in German wounded. More than 100 passed through the regimental aid post."

Three unbridged streams, complete tank obstacles, crossed the front of the 52nd Division at Drierwalde, Hopsten and Voltlage, so that the infantry had to advance without armoured support. Drierwalde had been taken and Voltlage was bypassed, but the small town of Hopsten still held out and must be reduced by force. The only fresh troops available were the Scots Fusiliers, as both the Glasgow Highlanders and the Cameronians had been heavily engaged. The Fusiliers were directed on Hopsten, four miles distant, at 8 a.m. on April 6. They left Dreirwalde by a bridge built overnight in "kangaroos" and troop carrying vehicles. The 6th Cameronians were to follow them, if required. An open left flank gave some cause for anxiety; there was no sign as yet of XXX Corps, which was in fact still on the west side of the River Ems, while the enemy had vanished during the night and his present whereabouts had not been discovered. Further, the employment of armour, when it could be brought forward, was likely to be prevented by the farm buildings and copses about Hopsten and by the surrounding marshes and ditches.

The main attacking force was preceded by an advanced guard commanded by Major Elliot, consisting of "A" Company, "C" Squadron of the Royal Scots Greys, a section of the anti-tank platoon, a section of mortars and an assault section of the pioneer platoon. The carrier platoon and a reconnaissance troop of the Royal Scots Greys provided the vanguard. By 11 a.m. it had become clear that the enemy rearguard was determined to hold its strong defensive position at Hopsten. The Germans were firmly established beyond a blown bridge, where the main road to the west crossed a stream. A self-propelled gun disabled the leading tank of the Scots Greys, and the engagement began sadly for the Scots Fusiliers with the death, soon afterwards, of Major Elliot, who had distinguished himself in the fighting before the Rhine. Colonel Gosselin reacted immediately by sending "B" Company, under Major Cook, out to the right flank to find another bridge, disengaging a troop of tanks for their support.

A bridge was found intact, and the remainder of the Battalion set about a flanking move to take this new line of advance with all possible speed. "A" Company, pinned down on the main road, had to be extricated under cover of an artillery smokescreen before it could join in this movement. The ground was boggy and there was no opportunity for a reconnaissance of the

intervening network of roads. Colonel Gosselin personally led his companies under shell fire to a rendezvous in a wood behind the undamaged bridge.

“B” Company, still mounted in “kangaroos” at 5 p.m., had been subjected to steady harassing fire and one of the tanks in their supporting troop had been lost. The bridge had not been blown, but the Germans were well dug in buildings on the other side, and were searching the whole locality with Spandau fire. When the Commanding Officer went to investigate he was assured by Major Cook that his company could rush the bridge with support from “C” Company, which was now in position behind him. Shortly afterwards Colonel Gosselin at his new advanced headquarters in an adjacent farmhouse was told by the Brigadier that two field regiments and one medium regiment of artillery had been allotted to support an attack timed for 1.30 a.m. on Hopsten, which must be taken at all costs.

By 6 p.m. one platoon of “B” Company was firmly installed on the bridge, with two sections on the far bank. A second platoon crossed over and seized a farmhouse on the left which had been set on fire by the tanks. This platoon was instantly counter-attacked from the next farm, which was also ablaze, and was overrun. Only the platoon commander and seven men got back to the company area. The original plan to occupy the two farms was abandoned, and the third platoon of the company, which had successfully cleared some neighbouring woods, was recalled to form a tight ring round the bridge.

An hour later, when it was dark, the Germans emerged from the farms and advanced on the bridge. The troops in the bridgehead were in doubt whether the firing to their front might mean that the survivors of the overrun platoon had escaped and were fighting their way back, so held their fire until the oncoming figures were only 10 yards away. They proved to be Germans, who were met with a withering fire and dispersed. A section of medium machine guns with one of the platoons did magnificent work in breaking up the attack, and the German commander and many of his force were killed. Two hours later a second but half-hearted counter-attack was also strongly repulsed. “B” Company’s two platoons held the bridgehead alone until reinforced by “C” Company. All but one of the Fusiliers missing from the third platoon eventually returned. Ten minutes before the brigade attack at 1.30 a.m. some shells fired by the divisional artillery fell into the Fusiliers’ positions, killing one man and wounding several others. As the Brigade Commander subsequently observed: “It was a most unpleasant night and one which I hope I will never have to come through again.”

The Brigadier had become convinced that the enemy could not be quickly nor easily dislodged, and that a brigade attack was needed to take Hopsten. He had therefore brought in the 6th Cameronians, who were already concentrating nearby. The plan, in its opening phase, excluded “B” Company of the Scots Fusiliers, already fully committed at the bridge, where it was protected to some extent by thick marsh. The Battalion less “B” and “A” Companies, but with one company of Cameronians under command, was ordered to secure a second bridgehead covering two other bridges in the network of approach roads, and then to drive in on Hopsten from the south-east. The 6th Cameronians, with “A” Company of the Fusiliers under command, were to await the first stage in the development of the Fusiliers’ attack, and then press forward to capture selected objectives in Hopsten. A troop of the Royal Scots Greys, a troop of “crocodiles” and a mounted scissors bridge accompanied the Fusiliers; and before they moved forward sorties of rocket-firing Typhoons engaged suspected enemy self-propelled gun positions.

The divisional artillery fire which had caused the casualties amongst the attacking companies left them scattered and disorganised, and as a result the attack was postponed for just over half an hour. "C" Company had some hard fighting in the area of the two burnt out farmhouses where "B" Company had suffered its earlier reverse. A threatening enemy counterattack was broken up by the flame-throwers and by fire from a self-propelled gun. The assaulting platoons reached their objective under heavy small arms and Bazooka fire from both sides of the road running east from the town. This was the enemy's last determined stand on "C" Company's axis. Casualties numbered 20 before the company consolidated on its objective about 5.30 a.m.

"D" Company had at first taken cover when it came under shell fire, assuming that the enemy had heard the engines of its supporting tanks. It now cautiously approached the bridge over which it was to attack, only to discover that it had been blown. Despite small arms fire at close range, and shelling from a self-propelled gun, two platoons managed to crawl across the wreckage of the bridge. The tanks then moved up, and with their first shots silenced the German gun. All three platoons finally made their way across the stream. Dispensing with any guard on the bridge they pressed forward and captured an enemy position in a house 200 yards beyond the stream. On the way one of the section commanders dived into a trench to take cover from a burst of mortar fire and found himself sharing it with three Germans. Two of these he shot, while the third fell a victim to his platoon sergeant. On the main position, however, the enemy fought stoutly; and when the tanks had to hold their fire to avoid hitting our own troops, the Germans raised their heads again and struck back. Just before dawn the scissors bridge was dropped over the stream and the first of the "crocodile" troop made its way across, but as soon as they were over all the "crocodiles" became bogged except one. Supported by this single flame-throwing tank, the Scots Fusiliers overcame the last of the German opposition, and by 7.30 a.m. were on their objective.

The 6th Cameronians also had a hard but successful battle. Their company which was attached to the Scots Fusiliers handed over its "crocodiles" to "D" Company and went into Hopsten as soon as the Fusiliers had secured the outskirts. With the support of some Sherman tanks it attacked a windmill and inflicted heavy loss on the Germans holding the town.

The Scots Fusiliers had secured all their objectives by 10.30 a.m. and although the Germans fired air-burst shells over their positions for most of the day some rest and reorganisation were possible.

Commenting later on the engagements in the area of Dortmund-Ems Canal, Brigadier Renny observed: "I do not know any action which began with so much ill-fortune and ended with more complete success." Of the action at Hopsten he said: "This was a battle which reflected special credit on the officers and men of the rifle companies, who fought their way through to the objectives in magnificent style."

6th Bn: Over the Rhine

On March 22 the 44th Brigade, including the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers, and the 227th Brigade were in the area of Vynen and Luttingen preparing to cross the River Rhine. At 9 p.m. on March 23 the 51st Division of XXX Corps opened a two-brigade attack on Rees, and an hour later the 1st Commando Brigade attacked Wesel on the right of XII Corps. The Fusiliers, with the other assault Battalions of the 15th (Scottish) Division mounted their amphibious "buffaloes" in the marshalling area, ready to assault early on March 24. At 2 a.m. they went down to the river. The

buffaloes “, each carrying 28 men, slid into the water and crossed its span of 300 yards in about two and a half minutes. The crossing itself was uneventful and no craft were lost.

The operation has been described in eye-witness accounts by a number of those who took part. Piper McGhee, who played the Scots Fusiliers across the Rhine to the tune of the 6th Bn's regimental march, *Cutty's Wedding*, has this to say about his experience: “There was nothing to it, but I was a bit scared when I first boarded the ‘buffalo’. There was a good deal of sniping and mortar fire, but the actual crossing wasn't too bad.”

“D” Company's attack is described as follows, by Major Bokenham, the Company Commander:

“We were the first company of the Battalion to land, the right hand assault company. Our objective was a bund 500 yards inland, but to gain it we had to cross a nearer and smaller bund, a road, and then move up between a narrow orchard on the left and a small wood on the right. The ‘buffaloes’ took us about 75 yards inland, when they came under Spandau and rifle fire from the nearer bund. Immediately the two leading platoons leapt out and charged. On the top of the bund they encountered two rows of barbed wire, overcame the opposition easily and took about 30 prisoners. They then pushed on to the further bund and crossed the road without casualties, although it was found later to be heavily laid with Schu-mines. They pressed on to their objective, came under fire from it, successfully assaulted and gained it, and consolidated about 75 yards apart. Just beyond this bund were three houses from which fire was being directed at the platoons. Under Lieutenant Murphy 16 Platoon quickly cleared one, while 17 Platoon under Sergeant Linard cleared the others, taking in all 25 prisoners.

“Simultaneously, 18 Platoon followed up and cleared an orchard and houses on the left. Then, led by Lieutenant Binge, they passed over the bund between 17 and 16 platoons, cleared it and linked up with ‘C’ Company about 200 yards to the left; after which they went into reserve behind 16 and 17

platoons, clearing a Spandau post on the way and taking 18 prisoners. ‘D’ Company dug in awaiting the order to move to the intermediate objective, which was 500 yards to the right along the bund. Casualties so far had been light, but unfortunately Fusilier Rogers was killed, and Sergeant Bell and Fusilier Murphy wounded.

“Orders came to move to the intermediate objective at H plus 90, and exactly at that time, when the company was moving off, tragedy occurred. Two of our own artillery shells, which had been falling close for some time, dropped short and landed in the middle of two of the platoons. Casualties were high. Sergeant Linard, Lance-Corporals Ward and Corner and Fusiliers Ward and McCaffery were killed; Lieutenants Binge and Murphy, Corporal Irvine, and Fusiliers Rowlands, Wentworth, Chambers, Bawden, Bishop, Pearson and Reed were wounded.

“It was now that the men of the company displayed their greatness. With so many casualties two platoons were at half strength. Corporal Crearie, the senior surviving non-commissioned officer, did magnificent work in rounding up the remnants and forming them into one platoon of approximately 18 men. Sergeant Curran, too, now commanding 16 platoon, was stoutly rallying his men. The company thus pushed on to its intermediate objective, Corporal Crearie's platoon along the enemy's side of the bund clearing all buildings, and Sergeant Curran's on the river side. This phase of the battle was completed successfully because of the fine leadership of the two new platoon commanders. The company dug in on the intermediate objective, having taken some 30 more prisoners. The only additional casualty was Fusilier Moffat, wounded.

“While this second phase was going on, wonderful bravery was being shown by Captain Mann, Company Sergeant-Major Black and the company stretcher-bearers, who were evacuating the wounded to the river’s edge and thence to the regimental aid post when it was later established. All stretchers were quickly used up and improvised ones made. Even so, the casualties could not all be got back. Company Sergeant-Major Black and Fusilier Williams in particular distinguished themselves by making repeated journeys under small arms and artillery fire across the mined road to the river bank and the regimental aid post. On many journeys they carried wounded across on their shoulders.

“Later in the morning the airborne troops went over at about 10 o’clock. Still dug-in and alert, the company relaxed a little and brewed some tea. Orders were received to move further right to extend the bridgehead, and Captain Mann set off with Sergeant Curran’s platoon to clear the route and captured a small harbour and several farm houses, while a few men in the company remained to hold a firm base. Using fire and movement to perfection, Captain Mann’s men routed a Spandau post on the way to their objective, succeeded in clearing the target without loss, and took another 53 prisoners. The rest of the company joined them and dug in on its final objective. Patrols went out and a further 19 prisoners were gathered without loss. The night was spent safely in this position, but there was some unpleasantness from fire on our own side of the Rhine at mines in the river, as well as from a machine-gunning dive attack by an enemy jet aircraft.

“So ended the attack and the gaining of the bridgehead by the right hand assault company. In 24 hours they had taken 75 prisoners and killed and wounded many of the enemy. Our own casualties were 6 killed and 12 wounded (two officers).”

Major Deeks, commanding “B” Company (who was unfortunately killed in a road accident on June 17 1945) has given this account:

“In the assault crossing of the Rhine ‘B’ Company’s place was on the left of the three-company attack. Its objective was the western half of the village of Bislich, with the additional task of clearing the bund as far as the junction with the Royal Scots, about 500 yards to the left, thus to enable the King’s Own Scottish Borderers to form up in safety and pass through to the rest of Bislich and beyond.

“At 2 a.m. on March 24 we were on the river. We had the most hazardous crossing of the three forward companies as the ‘buffaloes’ had to move diagonally across the water and land us some 500 yards downstream from our launching point. They did it without a hitch. It had been hoped that the ‘buffaloes’ would be able to take us right up to the bund, but the current was too swift. So the company jumped out on the east bank and the leading platoons set off to their objectives. No. 10 and 11 platoons, followed by Company Headquarters, were on their objectives by H plus 15, and 12 platoon set out to clear the bund soon afterwards. Opposition was slight and only a few rifles and about two automatics opened up. They soon stopped as the leading platoons assaulted, and the Germans were driven from their positions by 12 platoon. Many prisoners were taken in the village and bund and all of them seemed dazed and beaten by the barrage, of which 10 and 11 platoons had taken full advantage by their quick assault. The company quickly established itself. At about H plus 45 the bund was reported cleared by 12 platoon, although the Royal Scots were not contacted for another hour. The only casualty was Fusilier Thompson of 12 platoon, killed.”

By 4 a.m. the Scots Fusiliers had consolidated all along their sector, which ran from Loh through the western district of Bislich, and were in touch with the Royal Scots on their left. The King’s Own Scottish Borderers, having crossed the river, passed through the Fusiliers into

Bislich, and were established there by 7 a.m. The Royal Scots pushed on and occupied Vissel and Jockern, with a view to linking up with the airborne troops about to land. These troops flew in through heavy flak in an operation which lasted three hours, and landed beyond the Diersfordter Walk. They were followed immediately by Liberator aircraft loaded with supplies. The K.O.S.B. were the first of the 44th Brigade's Battalions to link up with the Americans, whom they met at a road junction south of Diersfordt, five miles east of the Rhine, at 2.45 p.m. About half an hour later the Fusiliers made contact with troops of the 17th United States Airborne Division; and an hour after that the Royal Scots were in touch with the 5th Parachute Brigade of the 6th Airborne Division. Already the 44th Brigade had taken more than 1,000 prisoners, many guns and much equipment. They now relieved the airborne troops to open the way for a break-through.

6th Bn: Crossing the Ijssel

Early next morning, March 25, the 44th Brigade moved out to secure the Wissmann Bridge across the River Ijssel west of Dingen, 10 miles north-east of the Rhine. The bridge was urgently needed for the break-through from the Rhine bridgehead to the Elbe. The King's Own Scottish Borderers led off to northward of the airborne landings, followed by the Royal Scots and the Royal Scots Fusiliers. According to the official records of the 44th Brigade the enemy strongly resisted the advance, using paratroops supported by self-propelled guns. Following tracks through the woods, the K.O.S.B. forced their way forward, fighting fierce actions in the woodland clearings. By afternoon they were well into the rear of the German 7th Parachute Division, still fighting near the Rhine north of Bislich. They had planned to take the bridge that night, but were halted a few hundred yards short of it by strong enemy defences. At first light on March 26, as the K.O.S.B. formed up to attack, the enemy launched a strong counter-attack with a reserve Battalion hurriedly brought from Bocholt, five miles to the north. There ensued a desperate hand-to-hand encounter lasting several hours, which ended with the K.O.S.B. still holding their ground. Nearly 100 Germans lay dead about the battlefield and 130 prisoners had been taken.

It was discovered that the Wissmann bridge had been destroyed and that the River Ijssel, far from being a negligible obstacle as had been supposed, was a considerable stream with a span of 40 feet from bank to bank. There was no alternative but to make an infantry assault crossing. While the Royal Scots extended northwards to protect the flank of the operation, and the K.O.S.B. remained in position to provide a firm base, the Scots Fusiliers formed up for the assault.

At 4 p.m. they stormed through the river and into the enemy defences. "There can have been few more gallant actions in the history of this famous Regiment," says the 44th Brigade account. "The dash and fury of the Fusiliers' assault was so terrific that within an hour they had three companies across the river in a compact bridgehead. By evening 360 prisoners had been taken and several counter-attacks beaten off."

Nevertheless, the Fusiliers were in a precarious position. If a bridge could not be built across the Ijssel by morning they could have no anti-tank guns nor other close support weapons with which to withstand the inevitable counter-attack. A violent thunderstorm broke about 6 o'clock, an hour after the Battalion had crossed the river. The sandy forest tracks became quagmires, and the heavy 3-ton bridging lorries could not get forward except by the main road north of the Ijssel, which was believed to be still in enemy hands. At midnight, therefore, a patrol of the K.O.S.B.

went silently down the road to meet the lorries. In the event the lorries got through undamaged, and reached the river by 4 a.m. By daylight the Royal Engineers had thrown a bridge across and heavy anti-tank guns were rumbling over it into position. This was a splendid feat of engineering.

A mile to the north, the Royal Scots, in position astride the German lines of communication, were attacked every half hour throughout the night. They expended their whole supply of ammunition, but had it replaced in the morning and continued to hold their ground. During the whole of March 27 the Germans counter-attacked the Brigade position on both flanks and in front. Subjected to continuous, heavy shelling, with little sleep for three days and its ranks thinned by casualties, the 44th Brigade yielded no ground.

The official Brigade account of the operation ends with these words: "They were the northern flank and pivot of the whole breakthrough and the armoured divisions were already pouring through the hole torn by the Brigade and the airborne division into the plains of Northern Germany. Night fell on March 27 with a Lowlanders' victory. The hinge had held. For four days they had fought with the enemy on three sides. They had stormed the Rhine. They had reduced every objective and linked up with the airborne forces. They had captured 2,000 Germans and vanquished thousands more. They had opened a road and bridge vital to the break-through, and had held it against all opposition. They had achieved their greatest triumph."

Major Gray, commanding "A" Company of the Scots Fusiliers, gives this personal account of his company's part in the battle:

" 'A' Company headed the column of 'kangaroos' on the approach march to the Ijssel. All went smoothly, apart from slight shelling, until the leading 'kangaroo' turned off the main road to run down to the bridge site over the river. There it was hit by a bazooka and went up in flames. Lieutenant Tair (8 platoon) soon had the passengers out and continued the advance on foot. Only the driver had been wounded. The column swung left behind the line of the main road and found themselves in what turned out to be the middle of a German position. A few Germans fired but most waved white flags. A small party was left to deal with them and the rest of the company formed up on the ditch in the rear of the main road.

"Assembled, we charged in single line, firing as we went to the river. We were shelled a bit and machine-gunned. We slid down the steep bank into two or three feet of water. Those who were unlucky slid too far and landed up to their necks in water. We re-formed under the shelter of the far bank and advanced, the right hand platoon mopping-up and the rest doubling across open ground to a wood code-named 'Elizabeth'. We were fired on by a self-propelled gun, one or two 20-millimetre guns, and some machine guns. We advanced firing. One party of the enemy ran like rabbits. But enemy fire from our left flank continued.

"We reached 'Elizabeth' with about 30 men and dug in quickly. As my 46 set was not available, two volunteers, Lance-Corporal Mitchell and Fusilier Johnston, took a message back over the open ground under fire to the Commanding Officer. Mitchell was unfortunately killed, but Johnston got through.

"Other platoons who had been dealing with 'Sheila', an adjoining wood, rejoined the company and we were brought up to a strength of about 50. They had collected 20 or 30 prisoners and we had rounded up about 30 and sent them across the river.

"A" Company's casualties were 4 killed and 13 wounded.

Lieutenant Billings, of "C" Company, gives this account:

“‘C’ Company, on the right of the assault, had orders to capture ‘Elizabeth’. We dismounted from the ‘kangaroos’ under heavy anti-tank, mortar and machine gun fire and formed up in a ditch. Two of the ‘kangaroos’ had been hit, causing heavy casualties in the forward platoon. The Company Commander, Major Adler, then led the two forward platoons into the assault. After covering 50 yards of open country they were pinned down by heavy machine gun and 20-millimetre cannon fire. By skilful use of covering fire they managed to reach the shelter of the river bank, thus protecting the advance of the remainder of the company.

“At this stage Major Adler was hit. The strength of the company was reduced to approximately 30. Major Adler, although obviously in great pain, carried on for several hours until all the company’s objectives were consolidated. Two platoons (14 and 15) were amalgamated and they selected for their objective a house on the edge of the wood. Before the advance a house and a trench, known to be machine gun posts, were effectively hit with Piat bombs. The house yielded 30 German infantrymen and one dead officer. Enemy casualties in the wood were approximately six dead and 12 prisoners. The German officer was pinioned and appeared to have been murdered.

“After sweeping the remainder of the wood, we were relieved by a company of the Royal Scots and were shifted to the left to help ‘A’ Company to hold their objective against enemy counter-attacks.”

“‘C’ Company’s casualties were 4 killed and 20 wounded. The part played by “D” Company is described by its company commander, Major Bokenham:

“To enable the assaulting company to cross the river it was necessary to clear up an enemy position on our bank and form a firm base through which to assault. ‘D’ Company was given the task. After the Rhine crossing this company was only two platoons strong: 16 platoon under Sergeant Curran, of about 18 men; and x 8 platoon under Corporal Crearie, about 19 strong. To assist us, two troops of tanks, a troop of ‘crocodiles’ and eleven ‘kangaroos’ were placed under command.

“The objective was a large farm building on the left and a long, narrow wood on the right as first objectives. Another farm on the left and two houses on a road on the right were the second.

“The company moved off in ‘kangaroos’, one troop of tanks leading, the other following in reserve. After an artillery concentration on the objective the leading troop of tanks assaulted the first objective. 16 Platoon was dropped by its ‘kangaroos’ right in the farm on the left and 18 Platoon, now under Captain Mann, on the front edge of the wood. A quick clearance produced a few prisoners.

“From the second objectives, and also from woods and farms on the flanks, the company came under heavy small arms fire. The position also was heavily drenched by mortars and self-propelled guns, shooting at the tanks, which were prevented by this means from getting on. One troop was ordered to deal with the right flank opposition and the other with the trouble on the left. All woods, hedges and farms on the flanks were shot-up successfully. Sixty-eight prisoners were brought in from the left flank alone. The tanks were still at a standstill and the Company Commander accepted the challenge of shooting the platoons forward in a ‘kangaroo’. Lance-Corporal Morrow manned the ‘kangaroo’s’ Browning machine gun and in the first assault, on the left, enabled 16 platoon to infiltrate into an orchard in front of the farm. The ‘kangaroo’ was then directed at houses on the right. When 15 yards away it developed a mechanical fault and an

anxious few minutes were spent while Morrow effected a repair with enemy bullets spattering all round him. No one in the 'kangaroo' was hit. With its Browning blazing away it withdrew.

"One of the tank commanders was killed by a sniper. Another tank had ditched. The company dug in, 16 Platoon in the orchard and 18 Platoon at the far end of the wood. The troop of 'crocodiles' arrived, were briefed, and immediately shot-up and set on fire the second objectives.

"The firm base had thus been secured. The main Battalion assault went in. The enemy, however, still remained in the area of the second objectives. But after dark the Company was restored, became aggressive and took further prisoners. As a result, the platoons moved into their second objectives at first light. In all, x 60 prisoners were taken during the operation. Our casualties were Fusilier Jordan killed, and Fusiliers Hunt, Scott, Walton, Waddell, Waghorn and Thombs wounded.

"During the next day the company came under spasmodic but heavy fire. Captain Mann was mortally wounded, Corporal Crearie killed, and Fusiliers Byrne and Heath wounded. The Company successfully held their position until 53rd Division moved through the Battalion."

Sergeant Urie, the Battalion's Medical Sergeant, had the peculiar experience in the Ijssel engagement of losing his way and finding 45 prisoners on his hands. His account is as follows:

"After the bridgehead was secured, a rumour reached the regimental aid post that 'A' Company had 30 casualties and could not get them back to hospital. The Medical Officer, Captain Pooley, told me to go up front with a 'kangaroo', find out the true position and arrange for the wounded to be brought back. I loaded the 'kangaroo' with stretchers and went off. We reached an S-bend on the main road and were shelled. The driver did not fancy going further. So I set out alone on foot along a ditch. Over a small bridge I ran full tilt into four Germans. I thought they were stragglers, by-passed in the attack, told them they were surrounded and invited them to surrender. They did. I disarmed them and went on. As I climbed over an obstruction, I bumped into another six of the enemy, told them the same tale, and they surrendered too. Over another small bridge I met a further half dozen or so Germans. One refused to surrender. So I quietly and speedily slid round him. Only one of the enemy could speak English. I explained to him that I wanted to reach a broken bridge and arrange for the evacuation of wounded. He told me to see his platoon officer and pointed across the road to a house. There were mortars, smoke shells, Spandaus and Brens popping off. I declined his offer. He went off himself, and presently called me. I doubled across the road, slid into the slit trench where the officer stood, and told him what I wanted. He assured me that there was no river or bridge down his way, which confirmed a suspicion I had that I was on the wrong road.

"The officer asked me some questions. I saw no harm in gilding the lily and told him there were tanks on his flanks and 'Tommies' ahead and behind. Generally speaking, the best thing he could do was to surrender. He was indignant. He was about to let me go when one of his men spoke in German and I was detained, since I knew the enemy's positions, firepower and strength. The officer sent me to a cellar, where I met another dozen or more Germans. I saw no reason why I should not try to convince them that they were beaten.

"After a while someone shouted to me. I went outside and an N.C.O. asked if the officer was in the cellar. I told the soldier that the officer was in the slit trench last time I saw him. It was then apparent that the officer had left his men in the lurch, especially as the N.C.O. told me they had been ordered to fight to the last man. He asked me if the English shot their prisoners. I

ridiculed the suggestion. He told me that he thought we didn't as we were cultured, and he went on to say that he had been in Manchester and London on business.

"He wanted me to go and bring back some men to take his fellow-Germans prisoner. I was not keen to do this, thinking that the Germans might change their minds and open fire on our troops. Instead, I offered to take them in. They agreed and brought me a large white cloth. I collected all the Germans and set out, shouting to make our own chaps understand that I was bringing in prisoners.

I was pleased to meet with our own troops again, 'D' Company, and I handed over my charges to Company Sergeant-Major Black. 'D' Company were pleased, too; they were going to have the job of clearing that house. The final count numbered 45 prisoners. From 'D' Company I got a picture of what was happening at the river. All casualties were being quickly evacuated and the rumour of 30 casualties in 'A' Company was totally unfounded."

The 53rd Division passed through the Ijssel bridgehead in the closing hours of March 27, to attack east of the river and occupy Dingen. The pursuit continued to Osnabruck and Munster, but for the present the Fusiliers remained static in the Hemminkeln area. It was a well-earned rest, as they had fought, practically without sleep, for four days.

By April 3 the leading formations of VIII Corps were in Osnabruck, 80 miles beyond the Rhine. A bridgehead was opened across the Dortmund-Ems Canal opposite Ibbenburen, north-west of Osnabruck, by the armoured formations, but pockets of the enemy resisted stoutly on a somewhat fluid front. Early in the morning of April 4 the 44th Brigade was just north of Minden, near Loccum. The Fusiliers travelled along roads thick with refugees, prisoners-of-war and freed slaves of the Nazi regime. For three nights the Battalion remained between Hanover and Celle. On April 12 the 46th and 227th Brigades seized Celle, liberating the town and the infamous concentration camp in that area. Two days earlier the VIII Corps had entered Hanover.

On April 13 the 15th Division was ordered to take Uelzen, which was stubbornly held by the Germans, with massive demolitions as an additional obstacle. The Highland Light Infantry of 227th Brigade formed the spearhead in the attack, and found fresh German troops from Denmark among the defenders. The advantage of surprise had been lost, and so strong was the opposition that the Fusiliers were despatched on April 14 to protect the rear of the H.L.I., who had been severely mauled during their advance to the southern outskirts of the town. By daylight on April 15 the H.L.I. had gained a precarious hold in Veerssen after desperate house-to-house fighting. Meanwhile the 5th Gordons on the right were attacking the southern suburbs of Uelzen itself where they encountered similar resistance. Both Battalions had to keep under cover the whole day, and no progress was made. The Fusiliers, however, managed to improve the position in the south-eastern outskirts, and moved up on the right of Hambrock beside the

K.O.S.B. Orders were given on April 17 for an assault on the town of Uelzen, and for the advance to the Elbe which was to begin next day. The K.O.S.B., however, managed to make some progress before the main attack, and established themselves firmly in the south-eastern part of Uelzen, taking a bridge over the Ilmenau in the centre of the town. Further, the 6th Airborne Division had now by-passed Uelzen to the east, and the 11th Armoured Division to the west, and these two formations succeeded in linking up three miles beyond it, thereby encircling the town. However, the attack was launched at 4 a.m., as planned, and in the face of slight opposition the K.O.S.B., with the Scots Fusiliers and the Royal Scots supporting them on the right flank, cleared Uelzen east of the Ilmenau in three hours.

Luneburg, almost at the River Elbe, was occupied by the 11th Armoured Division of VIII Corps, and the rest of the Corps began moving up to the river as quickly as possible. During April 19 the 22 7th Brigade moved northwards and reached the Elbe, while the Fusiliers with the other Battalions of the 44th and 46th Brigades concentrated 10 miles away, north of Uelzen. By April 25 they, too, were up to the Elbe.

Chapter XVII

OVER THE ELBE TO BREMEN AND LUBECK, 1945-1946

2nd Bn: *Lubeck*

4/5th BATTALION: *The Weser—Baden—Bremen*

6th BATTALION: *The crossing of the Elbe—Occupation
duties and disbandment*

2nd Bn

IN the operation of crossing the Elbe the role of the 5th Division, and so of the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers, was a diversionary one, while the 15th Division made the assault at Lauenburg. As soon as the Elbe had been crossed, however, the 5th Division was to pass quickly through the bridgehead and make for the Baltic coast at Lubeck. The 11th Armoured Division was given the same objective, but approaching on a wider sweep; while the 6th Airborne Division was directed on Wismar, towards which the Russian Forces were now advancing. All civilians had been removed from the banks of the Elbe, leaving their livestock, and the Fusiliers fed well for a week.

2nd Bn: *Lubeck*

The assault crossing over the Elbe took place on April 30, and the Scots Fusiliers moved to Ebstorf to be closer to the bridgehead. Light-heartedly the Quartermaster and his staff in "B" Echelon, established in the local railway station, issued a genuine ticket to Berlin to anyone who would accept it. At 11 p.m. on May 1 the Fusiliers set off through the pinewoods for Lauenburg in unlighted transport. They crossed the river a day behind the 15th Division, to the sound of distant gunfire on the left flank. Tanks of the Scots Guards accompanied the Battalion as it took the road running north out of Lauenburg at 3.45 a.m. on May 2. This road divided round a large lake near Breitenfelde, and there the 15th Brigade took the eastern fork while the 17th Brigade swung off to the west. The original intention of the 17th Brigade Commander had been to send the Northamptonshires ahead, but instead he reverted to the now familiar order of battle, with the 2nd Scots Fusiliers on the right, the 6th Seaforth on the left, and 2nd Northamptonshires in reserve. "B" Company of the Fusiliers, riding on the Scots Guards tanks, were soon in the suburbs of Lubeck, only to find that they had been forestalled by units of the 11th Armoured Division. The remainder of the Battalion, after a hard march, halted for the night nine miles short of the city in the village of Rondeshagen. "C" Company was sent forward to support "B", which was already under the protective shield of the 11th Armoured Division. Next morning, May 3, after a good night's rest, the four companies of the Scots Fusiliers entered Lubeck at 10.30 and took over control of the city from the armoured division.

"That last day was fantastic," writes Colonel Maxwell. "It saw the complete collapse and disintegration of the German Army. Not a shot was fired. Prisoners came pouring in from all sides. The second-in-command, Major P. S. Sandilands, D.S.O., suddenly appeared in a large car

with General von Sander, two of his brigade commanders and the chief of staff of 245 Infantry Division, who came to arrange the surrender of the division. I gave the chief of staff orders to bring his division to the village where I happened to be at that time. Heaven knows what happened to that division. By the time they reached the specified village we were miles away to the north. I expect they duly arrived and surrendered meekly to a couple of Royal Army Service Corps drivers or the mobile bath unit.

“No Germans in that part of the country, and probably in thousands of other places, can ever bring up the old myth of the German Army not being beaten. They stood at their cottage doors and watched their armed forces surrendering to any British troops they could see.

“Our tasks in Lubeck were manifold. One thing not required was to keep the local population in order; they were completely cowed. In fact, they were terrified of the thousands of ‘displaced persons’, released from their labour camps, who swarmed into the town and, unless controlled, would have resorted to vengeful murder and outrage. It was a major job to keep them under control. I had considerable sympathy with them, but couldn’t let them get away with anything. There were some fairly tough characters among them and we had to adopt a tough policy, even allowing for their appalling experiences in the camps. Eventually, the centre of the city became too hot for them and they moved on elsewhere. Some of our own prisoners of war who were gathered in were in bad shape; they were, I believe, taken away as quickly as possible and flown home at once.

“Lubeck, before the war, was very prosperous. The trade was the importing and exporting of wines. Enormous warehouses and vaults, distributed over the city, were packed with liquor. We had the pleasurable task of guarding them and, of course, the ox on the treadmill was not denied his corn. The news spread quickly through B.L.A. and people came to Lubeck by the score to beg for wine. Most were reasonable and asked for a couple of cases or so. But one importunate unit sent three ‘3-tonners’ and were ordered about their business. It couldn’t last. Eventually someone exalted gave orders that no more wine was to be issued, stocks were frozen, and joy in B.L.A. was confined.

“Our final job spelled a remove from old wine to old Junkers. It was the guarding of 20 German generals, of whom the senior was Field-Marshal Erhard Milch, Hitler’s Director-General of Aircraft Production and one of Goering’s henchmen. The Nazi ‘brass’ had been picked up in various quarters and brought to Lubeck for safe custody until they could be taken away by ourselves or the Americans. Originally, they had been immured in some city residence but professed fear of the ‘displaced persons’ and sought, and were given, safer quarters. This sanctuary was found in a three-masted sailing vessel, once a German naval cadet-training ship, which was tied up to a quay on the west side of the port, almost opposite the Scots Fusiliers’ headquarters. Sergeant Guthrie, the Provost Sergeant, and a man of many parts in the 2nd Bn’s history, was in charge. There was never a murmur from the fallen great. The memory of ‘Guthrie’s Hell-Ship’ lingers on.”

The Fusiliers remained in Lubeck until May 19, when they were moved further east in accordance with political adjustments of territory. After that they began a tour of the eastern edge of British occupied Germany, to Mecklenburg, Schwerin and Magdeburg, where they took over from the 4/5th Battalion of the Regiment. Finally, when the Armies were withdrawn to correspond with zones of occupation, they were stationed near Goettingen.

This part of the 2nd Bn's story may well finish with this quotation from Colonel Maxwell's diary, referring to "V. E. Day", May 8: "Churchill spoke at 1500 hours for a few moments. At 1530 hours a Divisional parade was held in the Cathedral square, every unit being represented by a small detachment. Major A. M. Foss (Union Defence Force) commanded our contingent. The Commanding Officer and Second-in-Command dined with 'B' Company that evening and discussed the King's broadcast. At 2100 hours we ate a magnificent goose at dinner which Captain Cairns (U.D.F.), second-in-command of the company, swore had flown in through his bedroom window that morning."

4/5th BATTALION

From Hopsten the Lowland Division moved eastwards in the wake of the 7th Armoured Division, over the moorlands of Northern Germany to beyond the river Haase. By April 13 several Battalions of the Division were on the line of the River Weser from Verden, a country town some 20 miles from Bremen, to a point opposite Uphausen, 12 miles downstream, where they were awaiting the arrival of the 3rd Division on the left, directed on Bremen, and of the 53rd Division on the right.

4/5th BATTALION: *The Weser*

Wednesday April 18 was selected as the date for the opening of the battle for Bremen, the last but not least of the wartime exploits of the 4/5th Battalion. The Battalion came up to Verden in the early hours of the morning, unaware of its role in the operation. "All we knew", says one personal account, "was that, for the first time, we were to be reserve Battalion and the last to move. It was an unusual place for us, but although we did not know it then, we were destined to end up in our old place, in the van." The striking force was the 156th Brigade under command of the 53rd Division, which was already preparing bridgeheads over the River Weser and its confluent the Aller. The 3rd Division was pushing to the Weser from Delmenhorst. The Glasgow Highlanders were to lead the assault, followed by the 6th Cameronians. The objective was Achim, one of several villages in the Weser Valley lying some 10 miles away. It straddled a road and railway running side by side through marshy meadows down the long valley, which was overlooked from the north by a high, wooded ridge. The advantages of this ridge had not been overlooked by the German commander of the Bremen defences, who had at his disposal an energetic body of marines, and resourcefully deployed his anti-aircraft guns as heavy, high-velocity field artillery.

The Glasgow Highlanders, with two troops of Royal Scots Greys in support, quickly cleared the village of Davelsen, two miles from Verden, and swung westward with the valley towards Bremen. Despite road blocks and shell fire, they reached the fringe of the next village, Langwedel. From the wooded ridge an intense enfilading fire fell on the leading company, and following their familiar technique of infiltration the Germans cut Langwedel off from reinforcement. The situation was restored during the night, when the 6th Cameronians, diverted from their original objective of Etelsen, eight miles from the start line, cleared the high woods of the enemy with rifle and bayonet. This enabled the Glasgow Highlanders next morning to occupy Langwedel and to exploit down the road to the neighbouring village of Daverden.

The Fusiliers were directed against Etelsen instead of making an attack on Baden, for which a complete operation order had already been prepared. Consequently, on the night of April 8/9 the Battalion had little sleep, since a new plan had to be made and orders issued, however brief. At ~ a.m. on April 19 the Battalion assembled behind the Glasgow Highlanders in Davelsen, where the valley took a bend to the west. Conscripted into the improvised force which the Germans had collected, and which the Fusiliers were about to meet, was a Battalion recruited from the Bremen police, a Hungarian artillery regiment, and some walking-wounded cases from the military hospitals. They acquitted themselves bravely and skilfully throughout a day of close quarter fighting among the outskirts of Etelsen.

Other tribulations awaited the Fusiliers at Etelsen besides the hardihood of the unorthodox German garrison. The right flank was exposed to the wooded hill on the north, to which the enemy had as usual returned after melting away in front of the Cameronians, and from which he was using his powerful antiaircraft guns as field artillery. This right flank caused anxiety throughout the advance on Bremen. An added complication was a shortage of ammunition at the British gun pits. The Corps Commander, after a personal visit to the Weser battleground, ordered up 400 lorry loads of ammunition. Later, this replenishment made all the difference; but not at Etelsen.

Both "C" and "B" Companies of the Fusiliers came under fire as soon as they passed through the Glasgow Highlanders at Langwedel and felt their way towards Etelsen. "Panzerfausts" opened fire from the woods and machine guns from barricades across the road. In "B" Company Lieutenant Sives, with the leading platoon, was killed. Through lack of information no clear picture of the situation was available at Advanced Battalion Headquarters, which moved up to deal with the setback. Just as the command vehicle was unloading at a bend in the road 15 shells exploded in the area, but luckily no-one was hit. During that morning the shelling was abnormal. Both Brigade Headquarters and the Fusiliers rear headquarters were heavily shelled and a visiting R.E. officer was badly wounded. "C" Company made slow but steady progress through the enemy fire, but "B" Company had to withdraw its officer less leading platoon and call down concentrations from the divisional artillery before it could make headway. Finally the companies in reserve, "A" and "D", were committed. These reached Etelsen and consolidated at about 6 p.m. without having had to endure heavy shelling or suffering many casualties.

The Scots Fusiliers remained in position at Etelsen next day, while the Glasgow Highlanders and the 6th Cameronians dealt with the right flank. In this enterprise they had only modified success, while further to the flank, beyond the road and railway, an attack by the 157th Brigade was also meeting with difficulty in the villages of Walle and Holtebuttel. However, the situation gradually improved, and on April 20 all three brigades were united and ready to resume a full divisional forward movement down the Weser valley. The 157th Brigade was back on the main route after dealing effectively with the right flank, which had been handed over to the care of the Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment. The 155th Brigade, returned from Soltau, was in reserve. The Division, half-way between Verden and Bremen, prepared for the final phase.

4/5th BATTALION: *Baden*

The decisive action opened on the morning of April 21, on a two-brigade front, but with the 156th Brigade continuing to act as a spearhead. The 6th Cameronians were detached to clear the

woods which grew thick above Etelsen and Baden, a village two miles further on. Although anti-aircraft shells from Bremen were landing among the trees, infantry resistance had dwindled. With the threat to the flank neutralised, the Fusiliers were able to make progress westwards along the road to Baden, their original objective. The German guns were again very active. On the previous night the Order Group had been working in a jerry-built house, when it was shelled with such persistence that the conference ended with everyone stretched on the floor. The German gunners were still in action the following morning, as "A" Company and a section of carriers patrolled forward to investigate the situation at Baden. The rifle company moved under cover of sheltering trees, but the carrier section had to face exposure on the road. At a bend not far from the outskirts of Baden the carriers entered the arc of fire of a gun planted in a copse to the north-east of the village. The second and third vehicles were instantly knocked out, all the crew of the second being killed. The crews of the remaining two carriers jumped out and found cover among the trees. The patrol returned on foot. Artillery fire was called down and the German gun was destroyed by a direct hit. It was clear that Baden would require a full scale Battalion attack, and not along the open road.

The Scots Fusiliers launched a completely successful attack on Baden from Etelsen at 11.15 a.m. "C" Company, with an artillery observer, moved quickly round to a knoll due north of the road and railway, named "Verdener B", which afforded an excellent view of the village. At 12.45 p.m. "D" Company, with "crocodiles" and tanks, advanced on the same side of the railway track. When this force had reached the tiny village of Ruschbaden beside the railway, the enemy screen began to break and fall back before the flame-throwers, and in its retreat was enfiladed by the machine guns and rifles of "C" Company at Verdener B. "C" Company then moved down to the village. It had inflicted severe casualties on the Germans and captured a large number of prisoners. Meanwhile "A" Company, with tank support, was clearing the main road through Baden; while "B" Company was consolidating at the south-east corner of the village. This converging attack unfortunately brought all three companies into Baden at the moment chosen by the Germans to begin a savage bombardment of the village, and all suffered casualties. The first phase of the struggle for Bremen thus ended with the collapse of Baden, and with the capture by the Scots Fusiliers of 243 prisoners. The 155th Brigade, from reserve, now took up the advance, while the Fusiliers remained in Baden for four days.

4/5th BATTALION: *Bremen*

A complex of roads and railways on the industrial eastern fringes of Bremen hindered the progress of the 155th Brigade, which had achieved some success after bitter fighting during its westward advance. The enemy proved particularly stubborn in holding the line of a railway running north-east and southwest through Mahndorf. On the morning of April 23 the 156th Brigade was ordered to concentrate at Uphausen, adjoining Mahndorf, with the object of attacking Bremen. After a week of unrelenting but unavailing resistance, cracks were beginning to widen in German morale. The flood of battle weary prisoners was rising; even the flak-gunners were showing less determination. Negotiations for surrender, conducted over the few intact telephones at Achim, and later at Mahndorf with the garrison commander in Bremen, which had initially seemed promising to Divisional Headquarters, had been interrupted on the first occasion

by the flight of 800 bombers over the port, and at the second attempt by natural misunderstandings.

The fate of Bremen was now sealed. The 3rd Division was advancing from the south towards the suburbs west of the Weser. The 43rd Division was swiftly moving from the north. The 52nd Division was about to deliver the vital thrust from the east. The Fusiliers left Baden at about midnight on April 23, and before many hours had passed they found themselves the first Allied troops to reach the heart of the devastated city.

“It was a decisive victory beyond all peradventure “, is the verdict of the 52nd Divisional History. “Let it not be forgotten that the Lowlanders had fought. . . a score of distinct and difficult battles all the way.... The civilian population was beyond resisting.... They had gone wild, looting, drinking, fighting among themselves for what are called consumer goods, their frenzy was complicated by the presence among them of utterly demoralised ‘displaced persons’ from internment camps in the countryside round about. All sanctions had broken down among those Germans, who rioted in their shocking inability to accept the consequences of their own political stupidity.”

General Hakewill Smith took no undue risks in the capture of Bremen. Under an artillery barrage, and supported by “wasps~~, “crocodiles~~ and tanks, the 156th Brigade moved from Arbergen at 4 a.m. astride a railway that wound through industrial sites in the eastern quarter of the city. The Glasgow Highlanders occupied the Focke-Wulf buildings, while the 6th Cameronians cleared the entire factory suburb of Hemelingen, beside the Weser. The Fusiliers, passing through the Cameronians, drove on through railway sidings, belts of factories and huge mounds of rubble. There was some shelling, occasional bursts of Spandau and rifle fire, but few casualties. The factories and buildings were so vast and bewildering that a whole company could become lost in one of them. “The main difficulty, however,” as Colonel Gosselin observed, “was the large number of Russians and Poles, many of whom had found liquor and were celebrating in no uncertain manner.” The last substantial and potentially dangerous obstacle was an anti-tank ditch, which seemed likely to be held by the remnants of disciplined force. Colonel Gosselin decided that this could only be taken by a full-scale Battalion assault with armour; but this final action did not go according to plan. “A” Company crossed its start-line at 3 p.m., but “B” Company, on the opposite wing of the assault, was hampered in its assembly by obstacles among the ruins and by crowds of rioters, and was 30 minutes late in attacking. As expected, the Germans fought hard and for a time were successful, but “C” Company with tremendous zest overcame all opposition on its front, and “D” Company worked round from the north to complete the rout. By 9 p.m., at the end of a memorable day, the Fusiliers were on their objectives, and the Royal Scots of the 155th Brigade were climbing over the debris to take possession of the great docks and to impound the submarines within them.

After 36 hours of long marches on foot, exposed to shell fire and snipers, followed by fighting in the labyrinth and wreckage of a destroyed city, the 4/5th Battalion now rested. It had lost two killed and 15 wounded. Three hundred of the 1,250 prisoner taken in Bremen had surrendered to the Scots Fusiliers.

A postscript to the operation was written by Lieutenant General Horrocks, commanding XXX Corps, in a letter to Major-General Hakewill Smith: “I am writing to congratulate you on the very fine performance put up by the 52nd (Lowland) Division during the recent fighting. I have watched the progress of the Division with great admiration and am certain there is no finer

fighting division in the British Army today. I should like to congratulate all ranks on writing another glorious page of Scottish history. Well done, the 52nd (Lowland) Division.”

6th Bn

Few divisions in the British Army during the campaign in North West Europe were given more important tasks than the 15th (Scottish) Division, and in all of them the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers played their part. The crossing of the Elbe was the third great river crossing carried out by the Division, the previous two being the passage of the Seine and of the Rhine. General Sir Miles Dempsey says in his foreword to Lieutenant-General Martin’s history of the Division: “They have many hard-won battle honours.... They may truly say they led the way for the Second Army.”

Martin sets out clearly the problem of the Elbe crossing. In his opinion the assault was in many ways more difficult than on the Rhine. In the march to the westward of the Elbe-Trave Canal where the 15th Division were to cross, the river in April was some 300 yards wide, the current running at one and a half to two knots. On the south bank (the Allied side) the country was flat, marshy, and intersected by canals, ditches and old beds of the river itself. There was a system of flood-dykes or bunds similar to those of the Rhine. For two miles of the approach the country was bare except for scattered villages; while beyond the river on the way to Neetze and Lauenburg, woods were large and plentiful. Only two roads led to the Elbe, from Sharnebeck to Lauenburg railway bridge, and from Luneburg to Artlenburg. These were the only approaches for “buffaloes” and heavy bridging lorries.

The north bank of the Elbe, to use Martin’s words, rose steeply from the water’s edge in a zoo foot bound so steep as to amount almost to a cliff, making the exits for “buffaloes” and other vehicles difficult. On the 15th Division’s right front the cliff was topped by the houses of Lauenburg and on the left, opposite Artlenburg, by the dense Grun Hof forest. Perfect observation was, therefore, available from the enemy’s side for about six miles over the Allied side of the Elbe. In consequence no movement could be allowed on the 15th Division’s front in daytime. A mixed collection of German units, backed by a considerable strength of artillery, held the enemy side of the river.

The 15th Division had under command the 4th Tank Cold-stream Guards, the 46th Battery of the 63rd Self-Propelled Anti-Tank Regiment, the 11th Army Group Royal Engineers and the 1st Commando Brigade. In support were the “buffaloes” of 11th Royal Tanks and the 77th Squadron Assault Royal Engineers, Sherman (watering) tanks of the Staffordshire Yeomanry, storm-boats and D.U.K.W.s. The divisional assault, on a two-brigade front, was planned for April 29 at 2 a.m. The 1st Commando Brigade was to cross west of Hohnstorf and take Lauenburg from the rear. On its right the 44th Brigade, with the Scots Fusiliers and Royal Scots leading, was to cross simultaneously from Artlenburg and capture a plateau in the area of Schnakenbeck, securing a bridgehead 2,500 yards wide and 1,000 yards deep. Thereafter the 46th Brigade was to pass through the Commando Brigade, then the 227th Brigade through the 44th, with the purpose of extending the bridgehead and opening a way for a break-out by the 11th Armoured Division.

In the week before the operation all units reconnoitred by night. Martin records that the enemy was not aggressive. The Elbe ferrymen continued to bring across passengers and land them on the Allied side of the river. German soldiers went down to the water’s edge to wash their mess tins.

On the road between Lauenburg and Boizenburg German staff cars went to and fro apparently untroubled. This odd situation is well illustrated by an extract from the History of the 15th (Scottish) Division: "The climax was reached when an officer of the Commando Brigade sent a German across the river to tell the garrison of Lauenburg that he himself would cross next day to negotiate their surrender, and got a reply that he would be received. Next day, the officer set out in a storm-boat complete with white flag, but the engine conked out in mid-stream. Thereupon a German rescue party towed him in. He interviewed a series of German commanders of ascending rank but all pleaded lack of authority to negotiate. After that, breathing threatenings and slaughter, the officer returned to his own bank, bringing back with him a very clear picture of the German defences and of the lie of the land on the other side."

6th Bn: *The crossing of the Elbe*

A heavy two-hour barrage preceded the attack. At 2 a.m. on Sunday April 29 the leading" buffaloes " entered the water. The sky was overcast, so that later in the operation air support had to be cancelled. The Fusiliers crossed the river not far upstream of the Artlenburg Ferry, the Royal Scots a short distance downstream. The opening barrage had been so effective that the Battalions made the crossing unopposed. Both units climbed the cliff face and established themselves securely on the plateau. Shortly afterwards the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who were under command of the 44th Brigade at this stage, made the crossing. Once over, the Fusiliers moved eastwards to link up with the Commandos, the Royal Scots northwards along the plateau and the K.O.S.B. into Schnakenbeck, while the Argylls remained to protect the bridgehead area. The Commando Brigade was equally successful and made an entry into Lauenburg from the north.

On the 44th Brigade's front opposition was still weak. By evening the Fusiliers were established in Juliusburg, the Royal Scots in Kruckow, and the K.O.S.B. in Gulzow—all far ahead of schedule. Three days had been allowed for the seizure of the bridgehead, but it had been taken in 24 hours.

The 15th Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment took over from the 44th Brigade on April 30 and without great effort reached Schwarzenbeck, where the Scots Fusiliers and the

Royal Scots later joined them. Meanwhile the 11th Armoured Division, building up in the bridgehead, were fighting off strong air attacks by German jet aircraft. Early on May 1 the division reached Lubeck and the Baltic, almost unopposed.

This was a moment of some historic significance, as Field Marshal Montgomery was at Luneburg Heath negotiating terms of surrender with German emissaries. Military Operations, however, were not suspended. The 15th Division was directed on Lubeck, to form a line between that town and Hamburg with a view to isolating Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein. By now the 6th Airborne Division had linked up with the Russians at Wismar and the 11th Armoured Division was in Lubeck and heading north for Kiel. During this manoeuvre, the Scots Fusiliers halted in the Bargejeode area of Holstein, where on May 4 they received the welcome news that peace had come. Later that night the following message from the Adjutant was received by all companies: "Pipes and drums will play long *Reveille* at 0700 hours tomorrow and incidental music from 0700 to 0800 hours in Battalion area. Drums will then play *Cease Fire* outside

Battalion Headquarters at 0800 hours. All spectators will be welcomed. Officers and Warrant Officers may now wear glengarries.”

6th Bn: Occupation duties and disbandment

The 6th Bn had its first experience of occupation duties at Kreis Segeberg, then moved with the rest of the 15th Division to the Russian frontier zone to relieve the 5th Division. The Fusiliers' area was round Schwerin and in this pleasant part of the country there were good billets, light duties, and excellent facilities for sailing and boating. On June 16 General Dempsey, Commander of the Second Army, paid his farewell visit to the Division and inspected the Scots Fusiliers outside Schwerin Opera House. The Division handed over Schwerin to the Russians on June 29 and moved behind a line running from Kreis and Segeberg to Lubeck and Lauenburg. On July 1 the Fusiliers returned to Bad Segeberg, where on July 10 Field-Marshal Montgomery addressed the Division. In November, he presented awards to members of the Battalion as follows: the Military Cross to Captain Tait; the Military Medal to Company Sergeant-Majors Thomson and Black; Sergeants Wilkinson and Clegg; Corporal Daily; and Fusiliers Smith and Mullen.

On December 10 at Bad Segeberg Lieutenant-Colonel Mackenzie relinquished command of the Battalion and returned to civilian life. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel R. A. Buchanan-Dunlop of the Cameronians, who in turn handed over a few weeks later to the last Commanding Officer Major J. D. O. Delano-Osborne, who remained with the Battalion until the end of its service. By March the Battalions of the 44th Brigade were in process of being disbanded. The official date of disbandment for the 6th Royal Scots Fusiliers was March 19 1946.

Chapter XVIII

AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR, 1945-1958

2nd Battalion: *Germany*

1st Battalion: *India—Germany—Malaya—Shorncliffe—Cyprus*

4/5th Battalion: *Germany 1945 to 1946—the re-formation of the Battalion in 1947 to 1958*

The Depot: *During and after the Second World War*

THIS chapter deals first with the activities of the 2nd Bn in Germany and covers the period up to the reorganisation of the Army in October 1948, when the 1st and 2nd Bns merged to become the 1st Battalion, the only remaining regular Battalion of the Regiment.

It also follows the original 1st Battalion from India to Germany, and the 1st Battalion after its union with the 2nd Bn in Germany on to Malaya and Cyprus, with short interludes at home, and carries the story up to the end of 1958.

A brief account of the doings of the 4/5th Territorial Battalion from May 1945 to 1958 and a short summary of the activities of the Regimental Depot during and after the Second World War are also included.

2nd Bn: *Germany*

Post-war life in the British zone of Germany was complicated and difficult and resolved itself into an exacting contest with the demoralising influences of defeat and victory. This experience was common to every unit in the Rhine Army at the close of the war and lasted in varying degrees for a considerable time. A commanding officer's essential task was to maintain the morale of his Battalion and, in order to achieve this, to occupy the waking hours of the troops with every sort of gainful activity in and out of parade hours.

In August 1945 the 2nd Bn was engaged in a general round-up of displaced persons in Gottingen and Han Munden, into which area the Fusiliers had come from Lubeck. The situation had been eased by the cancellation of the order for- bidding fraternisation with the German population, and on August 4 the Scots Fusiliers were hosts at the first dance with German

civilians at the Headquarter Company Club, which was described as a great success. The Victory Ball to celebrate V.J. Day on August 17 was an equally happy event; and by September all companies were providing entertainment in the form of "Children's Days".

General Hakewill Smith recalls that in 1945 the 2nd Bn was transferred into the 52nd (Lowland) Division, in which the 4/5th Battalion had served since its embodiment in 1939. The 2nd Bn was the only regular unit to serve in this Territorial Division throughout the war and in consequence of its transfer the Colonel of the Regiment had two Battalions of the Scots Fusiliers under his command.

The two Battalions moved to a new area at Truppen in February 1946 and were billeted at Steinhgim. "Truppen was not very attractive," says the War Diary. "The weather was foul, and the duties of the two Scots Fusiliers Battalions, the 2nd and the 4/5th, of guarding the civilian internment camp were not thereby made more agreeable. Odd things happened to internees who attempted to escape; one was shot through the head by an untraced rifleman.

Writing to the Colonel of the Regiment on February 9 1946, Colonel Maxwell, commanding the 2nd Bn, said: "I think we are probably unique in any Battalion in the Army; we have Battalion Headquarters (Commanding Officer, Second-in-Command, Adjutant and Quartermaster) and all six company commanders decorated." Some of the awards were won in the campaign in North West Europe, while others dated back to the Sangro, the Garigliano and Anzio—a proud record, whether unique or not.

The effect of the "Python" scheme of release began to make itself felt among the temporary officers of the 2nd Battalion in the spring of 1946. By the end of April the Scots Fusiliers were in Minden where they remained for over a year, and provided the pipes and drums for Field-Marshal Montgomery's farewell to the British Army of the Rhine.

During the last months of 1946 the Battalion was mainly occupied with training, but the incidence of guard and other occupation duties made progress difficult. For instance, during November the Battalion was held almost continuously in a state of readiness to deal with the disturbances caused by food shortages in the Ruhr. During this period the Fusiliers moved from Minden to Munchen Gladbach, then to Buer, and later to Dortmund, where a break in monotony was provided by the visit of a Russian general who came to unveil a monument in honour of Russian slave labour killed during Allied air-raids.

The early months of 1947 were devoted to instruction in field-craft and firing on the ranges, which was greatly hampered by the cold weather. Large numbers of reinforcements were arriving to be absorbed and trained; the young recruits were reported to be full of spirit and very keen, but their turn-out was bad. The Record of Service states: "Three hundred and fifty reinforcements wore their old No. 1 battle-dress, which they had had since they joined the Army and which was in a deplorable state."

April was spent in training and in the summer the Battalion moved to Munster-Lager to guard Yugo-Slav prisoners, after which they went to Vogelsang for more training. In July Lieutenant-Colonel Maxwell, who had commanded the 2nd Bn for nearly three and a half years with marked success, gave up command. He handed over temporarily to his Second-in-Command, Major D. J. A. Stuart, pending the arrival in October of Lieutenant-Colonel A. I. Buchanan Dunlop, D.S.O., from the 1st Battalion. Lieutenant-Colonel Maxwell was subsequently promoted to Colonel and made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for his services in the Korean War; later he

was appointed Honorary Colonel of the 4/5th Battalion in succession to the late Brigadier A. N. Gosselin, C.B.E., D.S.O.

Colonel Buchanan-Dunlop recalls that the main feature at this time was the condition of Germany, a defeated and occupied country, and the effect which such a background had on the occupying troops. Cities and towns were in ruins, and despite the efforts of the Allied Military Government the local inhabitants were living in extreme squalor and misery, often near the starvation level. Crime was prevalent, the black market rampant and every form of vice flourished among the civilian population.

The Scots Fusiliers, some 1,300 strong in October, were now comfortably housed in a former Luftwaffe barracks and airfield a few miles from the city of Dortmund. Conditions were pleasant, woods and fields surrounded the barracks, and game could be shot on the estate. In October the Fusiliers provided a guard of honour for Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Sholto Douglas, Commander-in-Chief British Zone, and this was followed in November by an inspection by Lieutenant-General Sir Richard McCreery who followed his visit with a message of congratulation on the Battalion's performance on parade.

February 1948 saw the Scots Fusiliers being moved at short notice to Berlin to augment the British garrison in the city, where their role was internal security and guard duties. At first the Battalion was split between Spandau, where they shared barracks with the Royal Norfolks, and Charlottenburg, shared with the Worcesters. Later, the Battalion as a whole took over and adapted as barracks the Olympic Stadium, built in central Berlin for the Games of 1936, where the Fusiliers had first call on the excellent playing fields and sports facilities of all kinds. They took full advantage of this, and their successes included the winning of the football knock-out competition, the junior football league, the inter-unit rugby championship and the rugby seven-a-side competition; while the cross-country running team came second in the British Troops Berlin championship, Lance-Corporal Hastie being the first man home. "I little thought", remarks Colonel Buchanan-Dunlop, "on first seeing the newly built Stadium proudly displayed by the Nazis whilst on leave in Berlin in 1936, the year of the Olympic Games in Germany, that it would become my duty 12 years later to take the place over as a barracks, nor would I have considered it in any way suitable to the purpose; whereas in fact the innumerable changing rooms and offices concealed below the stands would have held a brigade of infantry in reasonable comfort, if not a division."

The Scots Fusiliers remained in Berlin for five months, during which there were a number of alarms over the international situation. On one occasion they manned a stretch along the frontier of the Russian Sector for several days in isolated section posts, a difficult situation for the junior leaders and men. The Stadium was the scene of the King's Birthday Parade, regarded as of considerable importance for political reasons, since many foreign officers of high rank were among the spectators. During its stay in the city several important visitors came to see the Battalion, notably Lieutenant-General Sir Brian Horrocks, who took over command of the Rhine Army from General Sir Richard McCreery, and Field-Marshal Montgomery, who was then Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

After their tour of duty in Berlin, the Battalion returned to Dortmund. This move resulted from a decision by the War Office to make the Royal Scots Fusiliers a pilot Battalion for the National Service intake which was about to begin. The move coincided with the peak of the international crisis and the start of the Berlin airlift. The road exit from the Eastern to the Western Zone of

Germany was blocked at Helmstedt. Consequently the Battalion had to make a detour across country, and to ferry men, women, children and vehicles over a river on what the Commanding Officer describes as "Heath Robinson rafts", before rejoining the main autobahn within the Western zone. The Queen's Royal Regiment, who relieved the Fusiliers, were flown into Berlin in the airlift.

In Dortmund the national servicemen arrived at intervals, a company's strength in each draft, Major A. C. H. Adams being the first company commander chosen to receive them. "This was a great novelty at the time and the Battalion was much on its mettle," observes Colonel Buchanan-Dunlop. Madagascar Day, instituted to mark the association of the 1st and 2nd Bns in the same campaign during the war, was celebrated for the first time in 1948, when the Battalion held its own rifle meeting on the Ruhleben ranges. From August 10 to 15 Major-General Hakewill Smith visited the Battalion, and during his stay presented medals and took the salute at a ceremonial parade. It is on record that his visit was a most happy occasion throughout and that the General was in splendid form, which communicated itself to the whole Battalion. September saw another change in command, Lieutenant-Colonel Buchanan-Dunlop handing over to Lieutenant-Colonel D. J. A. Stuart.

At Dortmund, on Friday 29th October, the 2nd Battalion was officially "suspended", its state thereafter being described in official language as "in suspended animation", and its personnel were posted to the 1st Battalion. A word of explanation is perhaps appropriate here. As a result of the decision to reduce the peacetime strength of the Army, all Regiments of the Line with one or two exceptions were to be reduced to one Battalion, a complete break with the Cardwell System. The Scots Fusiliers chose to join their two Battalions into one, in preference to the alternative of disbanding one Battalion. This was achieved by allowing the strength of the 1st Battalion in India to run down, leaving only a small cadre party with the Colours to join the 2nd Battalion in Germany, which was then to become the 1st Battalion. In this way the Regiment was able to retain the funds, silver and property of both Battalions, as well as to preserve the traditions of both (for instance, the commemoration of both Inkerman Day and Gheluvelt Day) in the surviving Battalion.

General Hakewill Smith was present at the farewell parade of the 2nd Bn, when the Regimental Colour was trooped for the last time after 98 years' service. The 2nd Bn was first raised in 1804, disbanded in 1816 and re-raised in 1857. Its Colours are widely dispersed in Scotland. Those of the 1804—1816 period hang in St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. The Colours of 1857—1878 are in the keeping of Dumfries Parish Church; those of 1878—1921 hang with the original Colours in St. Giles Cathedral; while the Colours paraded for the last time in October 1948 were deposited in Paisley Abbey at a ceremony in 1951.

1st Battalion: *India*

When the war with Japan ended on August 13 1945, the 1st Battalion moved from Burma to India and was stationed at Dehra Dun. Further awards for the Burma campaign were announced at that time. Major W. R. C. Elliot, M.C., was awarded a bar to his Military Cross, and Fusilier R. Sills a bar to his Military Medal. Other awards were the Military Medal to Company Sergeant-Major W. Jack, Sergeant W. Gilmour, Corporal Johnson, Lance-Corporal Rutherford and Fusiliers Wilson (22), Green (18) and Smith.

Lieutenant-General G. A. P. Scoones, K.B.E., C.S.I., D.S.O., M.C., visited Clement Town, where the Battalion was stationed, to address the officers and non-commissioned officers on the future policy of the occupational forces, the current repatriation scheme and other subjects of topical interest. On the following day, during a Brigade gymkhana, orders were received for a move to Delhi to take up internal security duties.

In Delhi the Scots Fusiliers were quartered in Nicholson Lines. Further awards announced in September included a Military Cross to Major W. Coulter, while Captain A. G. Purves was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire. During the same month the Legion of Merit was presented to Lord Wavell, the Viceroy of India, and to General Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief in India, by Lieutenant-General Wheeler, Commanding-General of the United States Forces in the India-Burma Theatre, at a ceremony for which the Scots Fusiliers provided the guard of honour. The Battalion also mounted a guard of honour for a Nepalese general who came to pay a visit to the Viceroy. For the rest, the Battalion's routine consisted of steady training, which was subject to upsets, however, as the "Python" scheme of individual repatriation came into operation. Field-Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, arrived in November to look over the general situation in India and the state of the troops, and stayed to celebrate St. Andrew's Day as a guest of the Battalion.

In 1946 the Scots Fusiliers followed the routine which was usual in India at that time. During the winter they moved to camp at Alwar, leaving "B" Company on internal security duty at the Red Fort in Delhi, where the pipes and drums played at the ceremonial handing over of a captured Japanese gun to the Commander-in-Chief. By February the Battalion was back in Nicholson Lines. During March there were civil disturbances in Delhi. In spite of this the garrison was able to conduct the ceremony of the Victory March without encountering trouble; but after a fortnight of deceptive quiet the police force went on strike. Battalion guards were doubled and a cordon placed round the police lines to contain the strikers. Two companies of the Fusiliers were despatched to the main seats of trouble, the Faiz Bazaar and the Delhi Gate, but no shots were fired. By the end of March order had been restored.

For the first time since 1943, when the Battalion had left India for the Arakan, the Colours were carried on a ceremonial parade on the Guard Mounting square. During the intervening years the Colours had been stored in Poona with the regimental silver. In July command of the Battalion passed from Lieutenant-Colonel J. B. M. Sloane to Lieutenant-Colonel A. I. Buchanan-Dunlop, D.S.O.

During the last quarter of 1946 the Battalion was still stationed in Nicholson Lines at Delhi Cantonment, engaged in internal security duties. One company was on permanent detachment in the Red Fort in Old Delhi at immediate notice, with the rest of the Battalion ready to follow it into action if and when required. The Scots Fusiliers had a six months' lease of a permanent training, musketry and field firing camp at Kalsi, in the Garhwali Hills above Dehra Dun, in an area famous for big game. No tigers were shot during the Fusiliers' stay, but Major J. Gordon caught and made a pet of a young python, which he subsequently brought home and presented to the Edinburgh Zoo. Delhi had then no hill station for families, but most of the few who were with the Battalion were able in turn to enjoy a spell in the dak bungalow at Kalsi. During six months about half the Battalion was in Delhi and half at Kalsi.

The Scots Fusiliers were the only British Service unit in or within 50 miles of Delhi, and were therefore much in demand for ceremonial duties of all kinds and saw much of the Viceroy, Field-

Marshal Lord Wavell, who was most hospitable to the Battalion. As a small return the Viceroy was invited to dine informally with the officers, as Colonel of the Black Watch. He chose New Year's Day 1947 for this successful occasion, and was particularly appreciative of the piping and reel dancing. Other visitors during the winter included General Sir Arthur Dowler, K.B.E., C.B., Director of Infantry at the War Office; the Adjutant-General to the Forces, General Sir Richard O'Connor; and Sir Arthur Wachope, formerly High Commissioner in Palestine, who expressed a wish to attend a Church Parade service with a Scottish Regiment. He was duly invited out to the Cantonment to take part in a Battalion service at St. Martin's Garrison Church, which Sir Edward Lutyens had designed, and was afterwards entertained in the officers' mess. The service was conducted by the Regimental Chaplain, the Reverend W. J. Towart.

A letter of appreciation concerning the Battalion's internal security work in 1946 was received from the Delhi District Commander, Brigadier E. W. D. Vaughan, D.S.O., M.C., A.D.C. (formerly Indian Cavalry), which deserves to be quoted here:

"I would like all ranks who have taken part in duties in aid of the Civil Authorities throughout the past year to know how much I have admired, and how much the Civil Authorities have admired, the splendid work they have done. That they have not been called upon to use their weapons is due to the rapidity with which they have moved on receipt of orders, the restraint they exercised, and the intelligent manner in which they acted. It is no exaggeration to say that the timely arrival or presence of troops at various times in Delhi and the surrounding district has often prevented a major conflagration. Their presence and ordered action was probably responsible for the saving of many lives and undoubtedly for the restoration of confidence in these districts."

In March 1947 the Battalion won the Delhi District Football Cup, but not without a struggle. Their opponents were the Royal Air Force and the first game ended with no score after extra time. The replay again resulted in no score after extra time; but at the third attempt the Fusiliers won by one goal to nil, the goal coming in extra time. During the spring, the Battalion provided a Colour Party and Guard of Honour at Lord Wavell's last major ceremony as Viceroy, when he held an investiture to decorate five recipients with the George Cross. Soon afterwards these ceremonial parties were supplied again for the arrival of the incoming Viceroy, Viscount Mountbatten of Burma. Company long distance training also took place in the spring, involving moves from Kalsi to Mussoorie and Chakrata, and exercises at an altitude of up to 7,500 feet.

At this time came an announcement of the first step in the peacetime reduction of the British Army, which has been mentioned earlier in this chapter. Its effect on the 1st Battalion was to reduce the strength gradually by drafting to other regiments, and by release and cessation of posting, so that eventually a small cadre only would remain to take the Colours to join the 2nd Battalion in Germany, when the 2nd would become the 1st Battalion. The War Office directive to begin this process was passed to the Battalion through General Headquarters in India, and was accompanied by messages of condolence and valediction from, amongst others, the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief in India, the Adjutant-General to the Forces and the General Officer Commanding British Troops in India.

In April the Fusiliers handed over their security duties to a Gurkha Battalion. On Easter Day the Battalion held its last ceremonial church parade, attended by the Viceroy and his family, at which the address was given by General Sir Arthur Smith, the Chief of Staff in India, who was a lay reader. The Viceroy took the salute at the march past after the service. The same evening he

sent the following message: "I was so glad to have the chance of seeing the Royal Scots Fusiliers on parade this morning. The march past was excellent and I am sorry to think that such a fine Battalion should have to be suspended. The Battalion did a grand job of work in 36 Division in Burma and I am proud to have been associated with it. Best of luck to all ranks. Mountbatten."

On April 15 Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief in India, was invited to present the Military Medal to four members of the Battalion, Company Quartermaster-Sergeant Bowen, Drum-Major Burgess, Sergeant Rutherford and Fusilier Earnshaw, at a final ceremonial parade in Nicholson Lines. He afterwards met the officers, warrant officers and sergeants of the Battalion.

During the early summer successful efforts were made to preserve morale in the face of the decision to let the strength run down by the reinstitution of a Champion Company Trophy competition, in which companies, platoons, and even sections where practicable, competed against each other in every possible form of sport and military activity. Among many other items within this competition, which took two months to complete, the pre-war football trophies were reintroduced, including the Keef Shield, the Maley Cup and the Kirkee Cup.

May 31st produced some astonishing news. At 7 a.m. that morning the Champion Company Trophy had been presented to the Support Company, the winner; at 12 noon it was announced that, because of the incidence of inter-racial disorders over the forthcoming partition of India, the run-down of Battalion was to be indefinitely postponed. The result not unnaturally was an anti-climax, and Colonel Buchanan-Dunlop asked for an immediate move to another station to give the Battalion a change of scene and interest much needed in the circumstances. As a result the Fusiliers moved to Meerut on June 3, to re-equip. Meerut was even hotter than Delhi, and the families were installed at Chakrata in the foot-hills of the Himalayas.

From June to September the Battalion remained at Meerut, employed on internal security duties and engaged in Battalion training on the Ganges plain. In September Colonel Buchanan Dunlop was posted to Germany to take command of the 2nd Battalion, destined to be the surviving Battalion of the Regiment in all but name, at Dortmund. He handed over to his Second-in-Command, Major J. D. O. Delano-Osborne, who according to intention was to bring the Colours and the cadre party home in December, when the British finally left India, to join the 2nd Battalion in Germany.

On September 4 the Scots Fusiliers returned from Meerut to Delhi, where they were employed mainly on guard duties, including the mounting of a guard on the Supreme Commander's residence, which had previously been found by Indian troops. The political situation in Delhi was a delicate one, and serious riots broke out from time to time. Large scale movements of refugees to and from Pak1stan were occurring as the

population adjusted itself under the new political order of partition. From mid-September onwards the Battalion provided an officer and 30 other ranks to help in the organisation of Purana Quila, one of the Moslem camps containing as many as 80,000 refugees.

The transfer of power led to an event unique in the history of the Regiment, namely the operations of October 1947, which were named "Reunion I" and "Reunion II". These operations entailed the escorting of British military families, who had to be evacuated from the hills round Simla through a land more or less in a state of anarchy. The escort consisted of three officers and 65 men of the Scots Fusiliers, in charge of the Second-in-Command. "The account which follows was written by an eye-witness ", states the Battalion Record of Service, "and has not been re-

written as it is considered that it paints a clear picture of the situation from a soldier's point of view."

"Operation Reunion was planned, in September 1947, to evacuate European civilians and military families isolated in the Punjab and the Himalayan foothills to the North East by the partition of India in August 1947. It was to consist of three sorties from Delhi; the first and second, by the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, were to go to Simla and the Lahore, Kulu valley areas respectively; the third, by the 2nd East Lancashire Regiment, was a shorter journey to evacuate from the Dehra Dun area. To appreciate the conditions under which the Reunion convoys worked it is necessary to recapitulate the position in the Punjab during the period August to September 1947.

"Power was handed over to India and Pakistan as two separate Dominions on 14th August 1947. During the preceding weeks the communal situation in the Punjab had been deteriorating steadily as the Boundary Commission completed its work and it was obvious that, whatever the boundary award, it could not please all three of the major communities and would inevitably lead to civil war between the Muslims and the Sikhs, supported by Hindus. Trouble did in fact break out and the area from Lahore on the Pakistan side of the boundary to Ludhiana on the Indian side became a battlefield. The fighting and the minorities caused by partition led to vast columns of refugees moving in both directions; as the columns moved they spread stories of atrocities and destruction and stirred up local communal hatreds, with the result that fighting spread north-westwards towards Rawalpindi and towards Delhi to the south-east. By the end of August over 1,000,000 Hindu and Sikh refugees had reached Delhi, which in normal times has a strong Muslim minority. On 28 August serious rioting broke out; within three days well over 2,000 had been killed, the streets were deserted and the life of the city had come to a standstill. The mob had not turned against the Europeans, but it was possible that an incident or the desire for loot might precipitate a dangerous situation.

"General Headquarters had ceased to operate as such on 14 August and had split into the headquarters of the two Dominion armies and into Supreme Headquarters, responsible under Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck for administering the split of the Dominion armies. All British troops were under the command of Major-General Whistler, with his Headquarters, British Troops in India and Pakistan, in New Delhi alongside and under command of Supreme Headquarters, but Supreme H.Q. had very little in the way of personnel and motor transport under command. The 16th British Brigade Group was in Delhi, but at the time of Reunion it consisted only of the Scots Fusiliers and a total strength of about 500 all ranks; the nearest British troops outside Delhi were over 500 miles away.

"It was customary during the hot weather in India to send European women and children to the hills from April to September. In addition to families, a number of retired Europeans lived permanently in the hills and there were others who worked in the hills. By the end of August all railways between Delhi and Lahore had ceased to operate because of the number of trains which had been stopped and their passengers massacred. It was not safe to travel by road without an armed escort. The transport situation got steadily worse owing to the monsoon, which continued a month later than usual and produced the largest rainfall ever to be recorded in the Punjab; a vast territory was flooded and even the grand trunk road was washed away in parts. Even if it had been possible to provide reliable escorts for all by train, movement by rail was prevented by the floods which washed away the railway bridges.

“By September the position had become serious for Europeans isolated in the hills. Some had passages booked from India but were unable to travel to the ports for embarkation. Others had made their holiday arrangements in the hills and were unwilling to allow the ‘troubles’ to interfere with their plans. So, despite the shortage of cabin accommodation, ships were sailing only half full. With the danger of fighting breaking out again, Supreme Headquarters had to plan an evacuation from its own slender resources.

“The first step was to despatch liaison officers to the three evacuation centres, which was fairly simple in the case of Simla and Dehra Dun, as good signal communications still existed; but little, if any, liaison was possible with the Lahore, Kulu valley area. Next, Supreme Headquarters set about collecting a force, and herein lay the difficulty. The 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, the only British Battalion available, was by now down to 350 men and already had heavy commitments. The Battalion could only supply ‘B’ Company of 65 men under Captain D. Muir to act as armed escort, some cooks, and six assorted vehicles from its establishment. Transport for the passengers was obtained by withdrawing all 13 G.H.Q. buses from their routes in Delhi; these buses had the normal 5-ton military chassis with troop-carrying bodies, not a comfortable means of transport over long distances but the best to be had. They were driven by Indian civilians and were a tower of strength throughout. The only 20 3-tonners of the one Supreme Headquarters transport company in running order were handed over for baggage lifts. From the start they looked a doubtful proposition; driven by Indian sepoys, they were two-wheel drive, in a poor state of repair and not capable of a 3-ton lift. Both the bus company and transport company provided light aid detachments with heavy crane lorries which proved of immense value. Further small transport detachments were provided by the 16th Brigade, which also allotted six military police on motor cycles, and a medical group comprising a doctor and ambulance was included. The whole motley collection of 60 vehicles and 160 men was placed under command of Major A. J. Du Sautoy, Second-in-Command of the Battalion, and formed up in the Battalion lines on 6 October; while the process of begging and borrowing equipment, stores and supplies continued until the convoy was self-contained for a round trip of 500 miles.

“Instructions for Reunion I were to proceed to Simla, contact the liaison officers, load some 300 passengers and 50 tons of stores and return to Delhi, staging twice at Ambala; to complete the journey in four days, if possible, subject to the commander’s discretion. Interference by raiders was not anticipated, but stringent security precautions were to be observed. A detour of 50 miles would have to be made over country roads on the first and last days, as the grand trunk road was impassable near Delhi.

“At 5.30 a.m. on October 7 the convoy set out from Delhi Cantonment; at 6 a.m., before Old Delhi was cleared, two 3-ton vehicles had broken down and were abandoned. Once clear of Delhi nobody could be left behind without adequate escort, as this would mean either abandoning vehicles or towing. So two recovery groups, each containing an officer of the Fusiliers with escort and a light aid detachment, travelled at the rear and dropped off as necessary, so as to allow the main convoy to proceed. At mid-day a reconnaissance group went forward to contact Headquarters, Ambala Sub-Area; it was found to consist of a British brigadier with an entirely Indian staff who had to control about 100,000 Muslim refugees in camps, with very few administrative troops to assist. Some information about the convoy had filtered through, and the small empty British hospital had been earmarked for accommodation. The Brigadier did all that he could to help, but after the convoy arrived at 4 p.m. most of the night was spent getting water

and light turned on, latrines working, beds collected for the families, a cookhouse going and generally attempting to arrange a minimum standard of living for passengers on the return journey.

“The convoy moved out of Ambala at dawn on October 8. The distance to Simla was only 80 miles, but for the last 45 miles the road climbed a mountain rising to 6,000 feet, and there were ominous reports that the Ghaggar river was still in spate. The Ghaggar River was reached at 7 a.m.; one hour later one crane lorry was across, but the next six vehicles were bogged in anything up to five feet of water, and the two-wheel drive lorries had to be winched across one by one although empty. The Fusiliers and Indian drivers were by now very tired, but after four hours sweated labour the convoy was across and a base had been set up at Kalka at the foot of the hills, where all non-essential administrative transport was left. A reconnaissance group then went forward, reached Simla at 4 p.m., and found accommodation for the convoy available.

“The 300 passengers were organised into bus loads, each under a bus-conducting officer responsible to a chief conducting officer, a brigadier, who was in turn to be responsible to the convoy commander. Passengers were to include an archbishop, an ambassador, three brigadiers, six colonels, a number of lieutenant-colonels and a swarm of women and children. The baggage organisation did not appear to be under control, owing to lack of any transport in Simla for collection; and although a maximum weight had been given to families, few had taken it seriously. The original plan for 50 tons was a sad underestimate.

“The convoy arrived at dusk and, though no part of their responsibilities, the Fusiliers took over the work of centralising and loading baggage from the General Headquarters clerks at dawn on October 9. It was hoped to leave at 9 a.m. By 11 a.m. every vehicle had at least four tons of baggage; plenty was not loaded, passengers were still arriving and tempers were becoming strained. In order to avoid a night on the Ghaggar river a time ultimatum was issued and the convoy moved at midday, arriving four and a half hours later at the base camp at Kalka where a quick meal was provided for everybody, followed by a dash for the river with the passenger buses in front. But the damage was done, as the column only arrived as night fell. It was decided to take the buses through in the dark, with Fusiliers and military police waist deep in the cold swiftly moving water holding torches in a chain across the river, a risk which might have ended in disembarking passengers onto rafts in the dark. However it succeeded and all the buses went through, but an attempt to follow up with the remainder of the convoy failed, the first three over laden baggage lorries bogging down in the river.

“The passengers were taken on 20 miles to Ambala by Captain Muir. Every effort was made to bring the remainder across the river, but four hours later only one truck was across, six others were in the river, and the Fusiliers, soaked, cold and exhausted, lay down to get what rest they could by their trucks. A conference was held at midnight at Ambala at which it was decided to postpone the run into Delhi for 24 hours; unfortunate, as although stretchers or beds had been provided for all women and children, conditions were most uncomfortable. With the assistance of a company of Gurkhas and by dint of unloading, ferrying baggage, and winching the lorries across, the convoy was brought into Ambala complete by the afternoon of October 10.

“The return to Delhi on October 11 was uneventful, although the last hot 50 miles in open buses, across country roads and through choking clouds of dust, must have been very trying to the families. Hot meals were provided by sending forward a guarded cooks' group to prepare meals at given points on the road. The arrival in Delhi was somewhat chaotic. The dispersal of

passengers and baggage was in the hands of Delhi administrative experts, but late in the afternoon of October 11 it became obvious to Colonel Delano-Osborne, commanding the Scots Fusiliers, that no arrangements, expert or otherwise, had been made which could possibly distribute 300 passengers and a jumbled 80 tons of baggage over an area of 52 miles. Accordingly Brigade Headquarters and the Scots Fusiliers took over the reception arrangements, but it was too late to do other than improvise, and although by midnight the passengers had been distributed, it was two days before the baggage was finally sorted.

“There were by now more British troops available in Delhi, as the Battalion had been reinforced by a company of the 1st Royal Scots flown from Karachi, while the 2nd East Lancashire Regiment had joined the 16th Brigade from Calcutta. But it was decided to use the same force for Reunion II, which was likely to be more difficult and to need all the experience already gained. The convoy was given three clear days for maintenance, and to re-equip, before setting out once more on October 15 Supreme Headquarters provided what help they could in the way of movement authorities, but the country to be crossed was actually under control of the Indian and Pakistan Armies, and so a policy of ‘push on as best you can’ had to be adopted. As a matter of fact very little information could be obtained from any source, but conditions were known to be bad around Amritsar.

“Passengers were not likely to exceed 100 at any one time, and baggage not more than 30 tons, so it was possible to make a big reduction in transport for these purposes; on the other hand, petrol had to be lifted for the round trip of 900 miles, which would mean 12 3-ton lorries for petrol alone. Two of the military police despatch riders had crashed and been injured during Reunion I, but their services had proved invaluable, in fact the only sure means of controlling the convoy and passing instructions and information on the move; and so in spite of dangerous riding conditions it was decided that they must be taken again.

“The breaches in the Grand Trunk Road had been repaired sufficiently to allow the column to take the direct route to Ambala, where the night of October 15 was spent in the same hospital as before, this time with 100 passengers to be taken through to Lahore. On October 16 the route lay through Patiala State to Jullundur, and conditions got steadily worse from Ludhiana onwards, as crowds of refugees were camped alongside the road or moving with bullock carts. Two wards in the centre of an Indian Military Hospital were the best accommodation the reconnaissance group could find, but unfortunately the hospital contained many Hindus who had been mutilated in Pakistan, and the convoy’s Hindu civilian drivers took fright at this and were only finally persuaded to continue to Lahore on the condition that each driver had an escort of two Fusiliers.

“Brigadier Mackenzie-Kennedy, commanding the 16th Brigade, had driven up to the frontier a day ahead of the convoy, and a signal arrived from him stating that Headquarters of the 4th Indian Division were at Jullundur and should be visited. The division, which was controlling operations on both sides of the frontier, was completely Indianised from the divisional commander downwards. The staff were most helpful and promised to hold back a column of 250,000 Muslim refugees, which was to move from Jullundur towards Pakistan on October 17 and which Reunion II would have had no chance of penetrating. The Brigadier arrived back from Lahore that night, and said that the conditions were the worst he had seen since the retreat from Burma, and that the orders to stage near Amritsar on the return journey were out of the question; some other arrangement would have to be made. He allowed Reunion II to proceed on the following day after hearing the 4th Indian Divisions arrangement.

“On October 17 the convoy moved out at dawn and found that the division had been as good as their word; they were mainly concerned in organising the rival columns of refugees and moving them so that they did not clash, and were doing magnificently, as far as one could tell, without communal bias. They were holding back vast crowds for Reunion II over the first few miles. But despite this help progress was slow, as the road was washed away in large stretches, which meant moving across country on tracks. Refugees were camped all along the route; animal carcasses were lying everywhere, swelling and rotting in the heat, and although the refugees buried their dead each morning, the smell was terrible. To avoid vomiting everybody tied damp handkerchiefs over mouth and nose. The countryside was bare, everything green having been eaten and the trees hacked down for firewood. The Brigadier had arranged for a guide through Amritsar to meet the convoy at the Beas River, which would have been most useful had the guide known the way. But as he did not, two hours were wasted wandering through milling crowds of Sikh humanity. Crossing the frontier did not present any difficulties; as always, once away from the towns, the British could do as they wished.

“Reunion II drove into Lahore in the afternoon, and at the Lahore Club received a tremendous reception from the European residents, many of whom had families travelling in the convoy. Quantities of beer and food were provided for the Fusiliers.

“On October 18, after a night spent in the empty British barracks in Lahore Cantonment, the column set out once more back across the frontier into Amritsar, and then north towards Dalhousie in the mountains. A harbour suitable as a base camp had to be found in place of Amritsar at which to stage on the return journey. Fortunately one of the Lahore passengers had said that at Dhariwal, 20 miles from the foot of Kulu valley, were the largest woollen mills in Asia, and that the manager was an Englishman who might be prepared to help. The reconnaissance group found Mr. Longdin, the manager, willing to do all that he was asked, and the base camp was set up in the factory during the morning. It was an ideal situation, a large modern factory, self-contained, with a cantonment of its own inside the walls; it had carried on in complete isolation while fighting went on around, and even ran its own private army of 200 ex-Gurkha troops doing guard duties.

“The mountain road to Dalhousie is about 50 miles long, rising to 7,000 feet; it was bad in places and the G.H.Q. buses had to reverse on some of the hill road corners, a hair-raising performance. One-way traffic was necessary, block timings being in force for traffic in each direction; and so the reconnaissance group pushed ahead to catch the earliest timings. The Supreme Headquarters liaison officer was met 20 miles from Dalhousie. He handed over a pencilled list of passengers which showed neither addresses nor baggage weights, and said that the convoy was to be accommodated in Tikka Camp, which he had apparently not visited. After the heat of the plains conditions were unpleasant, with wind, snow and hail approaching blizzard force. Tikka Camp was found after some difficulty, and proved to be a Muslim refugee camp with no available facilities that were not already being used by refugees; it was totally unsuitable for British troops and there was no possible park for the convoy. When the Station Commander was eventually found he took over the liaison officer's work, and the empty Indian military hospital was handed over for accommodation and a parade ground for parking; but two hours had been wasted, the main convoy had arrived and had to be turned round on a hill road in the dark, a difficult operation and distinctly dangerous in the case of the G.H.Q.

buses.

“On Sunday October 18 a small convoy under Lieutenant Shedden was sent back into Lahore with 20 passengers and a platoon escort, with instructions to harbour on the 19th at Dhariwal, to cross into Pakistan, spend the night of the 20th in Lahore, and rejoin the main convoy at Jullundur on the night of October 21, bringing some passengers for Delhi out of Lahore. British-driven vehicles were sent, as the Hindu drivers showed a marked reluctance to return to Pakistan. On October 20 the main column moved out of Dalhousie with 100 passengers and 25 tons of baggage; half the passengers were school children who were temporarily ‘adopted’ in groups by the Fusiliers. Among the passengers were an ex-principal secretary to the Government of India and his wife, who were travelling with six tons of baggage, two cats and five servants; even so, they had abandoned their home in the hills and many of their possessions.

“Dhariwal mills were the harbour for the night; Mr. Longdin had done far more than was originally asked of him and had placed all his resources at the base party officer’s disposal. Bungalows were handed over for family accommodation, the factory club was turned into sleeping quarters and an amenity centre for the escort. Mr. Longdin personally put six officers up in his bungalow and insisted on feeding them. The generosity and courtesy displayed by the civilian European staff made this the most comfortable harbour throughout the Reunion convoys. On October 21 the route back lay through Amritsar to Jullundur, but this time it was not possible to make advanced arrangements with the 4th Indian Division, and the convoy had to struggle through refugees, at one stage taking five hours to cover 20 miles.

“The journey back to Ambala was uneventful, except for one peculiar incident which was never properly explained. A recovery group consisting of a Fusilier officer, five vehicles and about 20 men, were following some distance behind the main column. They were stopped at the Patiala frontier and accused of opening fire in the State, and armoured cars with weapons loaded and trained were mounted over them. The Indian brigadier commanding Patiala State Forces arrived and threatened to disarm the group and send them back to Patiala under escort, but happily the situation at the barrier was eased by the sudden appearance of Sardar Patel, Deputy Prime Minister of India, who had a conference with the brigadier, whose manner subsequently changed for the better. Later that evening the group was allowed to continue, after the convoy commander had driven back from Jullundur to investigate the delay. There was no reasonable evidence to support the allegation of opening fire, and of course no such action had been taken. Only the restrained and very proper behaviour of the officer concerned prevented what might have resulted in a serious situation.

“After nine days on the road the column arrived back in Delhi on October 23. This time the reception was a very different matter, as it had been placed in the hands of the Battalion from the start. An organisation had been set up in the British military hospital complete with office and loud hailer, baggage control, dining and cloak rooms, telephone for passengers, and, most welcome of all, a bar. It was a smaller problem than Reunion I, but all passengers had been distributed to their destinations within two hours. The same organisation proved most effective a week or two later in handling the Europeans flown out from amidst the fighting in Kashmir.

“In just over two weeks the column had covered a distance of 1,500 miles and moved 600 European civilian and military families, mostly women and children. The Scots Fusiliers, among the last of the British Battalions to leave India, were left until the end for the express purpose of protecting and assisting the European population, and it was a source of satisfaction to all ranks to have been able to help. A further source of satisfaction was the many letters received from

those who had travelled with the Regiment. Short but typical of these was the following: 'I write to thank you very much for the kind and safe way in which the Royal Scots Fusiliers brought me back to my home in Delhi. They were good fellows '."

The final warning order to leave India was received in November, and at their farewell parade the Scots Fusiliers were inspected by Lord Mountbatten, who presented the Battalion with a miniature flag. Whilst in Delhi, Colour-Sergeant Wilson was awarded the British Empire Medal for gallantry in rescuing the pilot of a Dakota which had crashed in flames in the lines. The Battalion reached Ballard Pier in Bombay on Christmas Eve 1947 and embarked in the transport *Empress of Australia*. Christmas dinners and a children's party were provided on board, and the ship sailed on December 28. Aden was in sight on New Year's Day.

The Battalion arrived at Liverpool on January 14 1948, where amongst others to greet them were Major-Generals Hakewill Smith, Delano-Osborne, Utterson-Kelso and Clutterbuck. Before disembarkation the Commanding Officer presented a commemoration plaque to the ship. The Fusiliers travelled by rail to Fairfield Camp at Monkton in Ayrshire and dispersed on leave. On March 5 the Provost of Ayr, on behalf of the Royal Burgh, gave a civic welcome to the Battalion, which was attended by the Lord Lieutenant of the County, presenting the Regiment with the Freedom of the Burgh, after which the Fusiliers marched through the town with Colours flying, bayonets fixed and drums beating. In April Field-Marshal Viscount Montgomery of Alamein visited the Battalion, accompanied by the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Scottish Command, and the Colonel of the Regiment, and afterwards lunched in the officers' mess. In July the Battalion cadre party moved to Dundonald Camp at Troon, and later to Churchill Barracks in Ayr, preparatory to joining the 2nd Bn in Germany and bestowing on it the designation of the 1st Battalion.

1st Battalion: *Germany*

In September 1948 Colonel Stuart finished his tour of command, and until the arrival of his successor, Lieutenant-Colonel W. S. Ritchie, O.B.E., early in 1950 the Battalion was temporarily commanded by Major J. Mahony, M.C., of the Cameronians, who had been Stuart's Second-in-Command. At Dortmund on October 8 the Scots Fusiliers took part in the march past of the 2nd Division and Allied troops. Later in the year both Gheluvelt Day and Inkerman Day were observed in the traditional manner.

The Battalion changed station in the winter of 1949 and moved to Bielefeld, where they were quartered in Ripon Barracks. Lieutenant-Colonel Ritchie arrived there to take over command on January 5 1950. He records that the depleted strength of the Battalion during the first half of the year presented a real problem. This was to some extent due to the group system " , under which the Scots Fusiliers had had to send a large number of men to the Cameronians in I receiving in exchange men with insufficient unexpired service to allow them to accompany the Cameronians further East. As a result, a year later the Battalion had in effect a double outflow and only a single intake. This made things difficult not only in barracks but even more on Battalion training, when the choice lay between providing three companies each of one platoon or one company of three platoons. The manning of the special 1st platoons, too, was a problem under these conditions and approximately 50 per cent of each draft had to be put to special 1st training on arrival.

Much work was required to make the various barracks in which the Fusiliers were accommodated suitable and comfortable for an infantry Battalion, and there was a shortage of married quarters, which resulted in a trail of families being left behind on the various changes of station. On a brighter note Colonel Ritchie pays tribute to the help given to the Battalion by its 100 or so German employees; mechanics, clerks, cooks, cleaners and grooms amongst others; all of whom served the Fusiliers well and faithfully and were a material factor in the maintenance of morale.

On June 9 at Bielefeld Lord Trenchard, on behalf of His Majesty the King, presented new Colours to the Battalion. The parade was attended by the Colonel of the Regiment, and during the ceremony the pipes and drums played *The Arakan Patrol*, so named to commemorate the Battalions service in the Arakan. Lord Trenchard, in his speech on parade, referred to a similar ceremony in Glasgow in 1891, when the Duke of Cambridge had highly praised the Battalion. In the sergeants' mess after the parade Lord Trenchard recalled in the course of reminiscences that as a subaltern he had once risked displeasure by asking for *A Bicycle Built for Two* to be played on the pipes. At Bielefeld that evening at an all ranks dance he was delighted to hear the tune played by Pipe-Major Stevenson. While the necessary preparations for the ceremonial parade naturally absorbed much of the Battalion's time, training was not neglected and a highly successful demonstration was staged to show an infantry company in the attack on its own and in co-operation with tanks.

The task of the Scots Fusiliers in the British Army of the Rhine covered three roles. The primary role was to assist in the defence of Germany. In this the Battalion was responsible for the defence of certain bridges over the Rhine, which had been reconnoitred down to company command level, including sites for individual weapons. Naturally the plan had a very high security classification, and few reconnaissances were allowed; but the relevant administrative problems were frequently covered in exercises. The second role was of a quite different nature, being a shared responsibility for what may be broadly called public relations. Every opportunity was taken to display the Battalion, which was generally very popular, as the men were well-behaved and mixed freely with the local population. In fact, a number of the Fusiliers married German women, in spite of the complicated procedure which that involved. The third role was one of internal security, although civil unrest was not anticipated and the German police were an expanding and very efficient force. The Battalion moved to Munster in the autumn, as a result of some re-grouping within the Army of the Rhine.

At home, Captain R. D. Grieg of the Scots Fusiliers won the King's Prize at Bisley. On November 5 the old Colours of the 1st Battalion, which had seen 55 years' service, were laid up in the Old Kirk at Ayr. In the presence of the Colonel of the Regiment, Colonel Ritchie handed over the Colours to the Minister of the Kirk for safe keeping at a ceremony for which the 4/5th Battalion provided a Guard of Honour.

An appointment of interest to the Regiment in 1951 was that of Major-General Hakewill Smith, the Colonel of the Regiment, to be Governor of the Military Knights of Windsor. That year was also marked by two official announcements of great significance to the Royal Scots Fusiliers. The first of these was the approval by His Majesty the King of the battle honours for the Peninsular and Seven Years Wars allotted to those Regiments which had fought in them. The Scots Fusiliers were one of the eight Regiments to be granted the honour: *Belleisle*, a battle of the Seven Years War of 1756 to 1763. The second was an announcement which appeared in *Army*

Council Instructions in September, authorising the wearing of the Glengarry head-dress by the Royal Scots Fusiliers, in distinction from all other Scottish Regiments, which were to wear bonnets.

At Easter Dr. Watt, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, visited the Battalion in Germany and preached at a joint service of the Royal Scots Fusiliers and Royal Scots. In July the Pipe-Major took a team of pipers to Belgrade, where they performed at a reception given at the British Embassy by the Ambassador, Sir Charles Peake.

At home, on November 4, the Colours of the 2nd Battalion were laid up in Paisley Abbey in the presence of the Colonel of the Regiment. They were handed over by Colonel W. Tod, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., who had commanded the Battalion at the time of its redoubtable last stand before Dunkirk. During the ceremony a memorial panel to the 2nd Battalion was unveiled by Major-General J. E. Utterson-Kelso, C.B., D.S.O., a Scots Fusilier distinguished for his services in both World Wars, whom Arthur Bryant describes in *The Turn of the Tide, 1914–1918*, his book based on Field-Marshal Alanbrooke's diaries, as "a brilliant trainer of troops who... was one of the pioneers of the battle-school". The 4/5th Battalion provided the guard of honour and pipers.

During November and December the 1st Battalion moved to Wuppertal, to make room in Munster for the 6th Armoured Division. The barracks at Wuppertal had been a hospital for displaced persons, and the Fusiliers began life there with no cookhouses, institutes nor officers' and sergeants' messes. Cooking and feeding had to take place in the company barrack blocks, and the Battalion largely relied on mobile canteens, which worked well. The Royal Scots, who were stationed in barracks nearby, helped the Royal Scots Fusiliers greatly at this time, by offering the hospitality of their officers' and sergeants' messes and regimental institutes.

The year 1950 had not been a particularly successful one for the Scots Fusiliers in their sporting activities; but 1951 saw them in the quarter-final of the Army Football Cup, while in 1952 the Battalion reached the semi-final, in achieving which they won the Rhine Army Cup. The credit for these successes was largely due to Sergeant Gilmour, the Provost Sergeant, who was most painstaking in his search for football talent and in organising training and competitions. The Battalion also took part in athletic meetings, motor cycle trials and many other forms of sport with varying degrees of success. In both 1951 and 1952 the Fusiliers' machine-gunners scored successes in the Army Rifle Association non-central Machine Gun Fire Control Cup; and in 1952 the Battalion team won the motor cycle trials. In the autumn of 1952 a detachment with pipes and drums represented the British Army at the Congress of Reserve Officers at Strasburg.

In September that year Colonel Ritchie was posted to West Africa on promotion, and Lieutenant-Colonel M. R. J. Hope Thomson, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., was appointed to succeed him. He arrived in January 1953 to take over from Major R. C. Cave, who had been temporarily in command since Colonel Ritchie's departure. The Battalion was now in Berlin, where the barracks were excellent. The principal duties of the Scots Fusiliers consisted of internal security duties, ceremonial and guards. At this time it was believed that the Battalion would return to the British Army of the Rhine at the end of the year, and training was organised accordingly. During the football season the Royal Scots Fusiliers defeated the Royal Scots in the semi-final of the Rhine Army Football Cup and went on to win the competition by beating the 9th Lancers in the final by 4 goals to 1, they were, however, defeated in the semi-final of the Army Cup at Berlin Stadium by the Royal Army Ordnance Corps team from the United Kingdom. Madagascar Day was celebrated in May by a beating of *Retreat* in full dress, and immediately afterwards the

regimental band and the pipes and drums left for home to take part in the Coronation Parade. Representing the Regiment in the Coronation Procession were a detachment from the 1st Battalion with the pipes and drums and regimental band; parties from the Depot, the 4/5th Battalion and the Home Guard; and detachments from the affiliated Commonwealth regiments, Prince Alfred's Guard from South Africa and the Scots Fusiliers of Canada.

In Berlin the 1st Battalion took part in a brigade ceremonial parade to mark the occasion, which was watched and loudly applauded by some 30,000 Germans, and in the evening gave a Regimental Ball, which passed off very successfully in spite of the tense situation created locally by riots in East Berlin, which had caused all troops to be confined to barracks. The ball was held not only in honour of the Coronation, but also to commemorate the 275th Anniversary of the Regiment, which had now had an unbroken existence since 1678. No Fusilier officer present that night had any premonition that the Regiment was not destined to celebrate its tercentenary under the same name and identity.

During the summer the Battalion began to feel the effects of the current man-power crisis, which resulted in one company being placed in suspended animation and the remaining companies kept at very low strength. The Battalion was now organised into three functional groups, one standing by on internal security, one, training and the third finding guards and duties. In September the Fusiliers were on guard duty at Spandau prison, guarding Admiral Doenitz, Raeder, Speer, Von Schirach and Hess. In September too it was learned that the Battalion would not return to the British Army of the Rhine in 1954, but was to go to Malaya instead. This decision was very popular with all ranks, but raised considerable problems arising from the acute shortage of non-commissioned officers and men. Plans were made to begin jungle training.

At home, the 275th Anniversary of the raising of the Regiment was marked by the presentation of new Colours to the 4/5th Battalion at Ayr by the Lord Lieutenant of the County on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen. On September 27 a memorial service was held in the Old Kirk at Ayr; and the centenary celebrations ended with a dinner for all ranks in the town.

On January 5 1954 the 1st Battalion advanced party left Germany for Malaya, and on the 19th the Scots Fusiliers held a farewell parade in Berlin, at which the salute was taken by General Sir Richard Gale, Commander-in-Chief Northern Army Group. At the end of the month the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Anthony Eden, visited the Battalion, spoke to the troops and was entertained in the officers' mess. At the beginning of February the Battalion left Berlin for Edinburgh, handing over its duties to the Grenadier Guards. In Edinburgh it was accommodated in Redford Barracks, and paraded through the city with bayonets fixed and Colours flying. There followed a very busy period during which the Battalion, reduced only a few months before in Berlin to a cadre of under 250 of all ranks eligible for service in the Far East, absorbed more than 500 men in drafts, although the intake of non-commissioned officers was very meagre.

1st Battalion: *Malaya*

The 1st Battalion sailed for Singapore in the transport *Asturias* with a strength of 950 all ranks, and arrived some three weeks later. The Commanding Officer, who had left in March by

air to join the advanced party, found Khan Abrader Mohammed Abdullah, the surviving brother of the Kader Bux family, in full control of the situation and obviously overjoyed at contracting for the Regiment once again. Training began at once, and in June the Fusiliers took over Butterworth Camp, on the mainland opposite the island of Penang, with Head-quarters Company and the families in Penang. About the middle of the month they began anti-terrorist operations. An immediate success resulted in the killing of two terrorists in one day, which gave rise to optimistic expectations that this rate might continue, but the following weary months told a different and less exciting story.

During the summer months the Battalion moved to various camps, engaging in a series of operations against the terrorists. To visit all the companies by road entailed a round trip of some 200 miles, and in consequence the Commanding Officer made extensive use of Auster aircraft. In the autumn the "run out" of National Servicemen recruited in Berlin and the United Kingdom began to take effect, reaching maximum intensity early in 1955; so a considerable recruit training organisation had to be set up in Penang to indoctrinate the new drafts which were beginning to arrive from home. On November 29 a successful operation was carried out by a patrol led by Lieutenant Andrews against a terrorist camp, resulting in three terrorists being killed and a probable further three wounded, though these escaped. Lieutenant Andrews was wounded and was later awarded the Military Cross.

For the next few months the Battalion continued to operate in two main areas, north of Ipoh and on the Thailand border, companies often being out in the jungle for up to five weeks at a time supplied and reinforced by helicopter. In these circumstances each company held its own New Year celebrations. The National Servicemen took readily to jungle work after training and experience, and many became non-commissioned officers, leading their own patrols. In May 1955 "Operation Unity against the terrorists on the Thailand border began. It was planned and executed in conjunction with the Malayan Police Force, with Lieutenant-Colonel Hope Thomson as the tactical commander for the operation. Later that month he relinquished command at a farewell parade held at Battalion Headquarters, and was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel J.

D. O. Delano-Osborne.

Colonel Hope Thomson comments that 18 months of continuous and sustained jungle operations had resulted in the destruction or capture of about a dozen terrorists, but that the value of the Battalion's contribution could not be measured merely by this yardstick. Throughout the whole period some part of the Battalion was always deep in the jungle, harassing the continually moving terrorists, and sometimes all five operational companies were in action simultaneously over an area of many hundreds of square miles.

At home during 1954 an interesting Regimental ceremony took place in Portsmouth, where a commemorative plaque was presented on behalf of the Regiment to St. Andrew's Church, which had been used by the 1st Battalion from 1926 to 1928, by Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. I. Jackson, D.S.O., who had commanded the Battalion for most of its stay in Portsmouth.

During the autumn of 1955 the 1st Battalion was united again in the plains. Re-training began in November, but was interrupted at the end of the year when the Battalion was again split up. Sporting achievements in that period included winning the final of the Malaya Football Cup; and the Battalion was narrowly defeated in the Far East Land Forces final. Major Evetts captained the Penang Polo team, which won the State Final.

1956 started sadly for the Scots Fusiliers with the death on February 10 of Lord Trenchard, to whose memory and life-long services to the Regiment tributes have been paid elsewhere. At the funeral service in Westminster Abbey on February 21 the Regiment was represented by an armed detachment of 2 officers and 20 other ranks, found from the permanent staffs of the Depot and the 4/5th Battalion, which marched, the only armed body of troops on parade, at the head of all the Services in the procession. Major J. W. Peyton, M.C., was in command of the detachment. Pipe-Major Stoddart, alone on the steps of the Air Ministry, played *Flowers of the Forest* as the coffin was borne out and placed on the gun-carriage. Major-General Hakewill Smith was one of the insignia bearers. During the previous day, the detachment had mounted two guards at the ceremonial lying-in-state.

The Suez crisis had repercussions for the Scots Fusiliers, as it delayed the homeward sailings of National Service personnel. During 1956 the 1st Battalion was continuously employed on small and large scale projects, including brigade operations, and achieved good results in its bandit hunting activities. The football team won the Malaya Cup for the second year running, and also won the Lin Seng Fook Football Cup. The Commander-in-Chief Far East Land Forces, General Sir Francis Festing, visited the Battalion, which had been under his command during the war in Madagascar and in Burma; and the Fusiliers provided a guard of honour for His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh at Penang. Two awards were announced during the year. Lieutenant D. G. H. Andrews was awarded the Military Cross for the platoon action, mentioned previously, near Chenor in Perak; and Fusilier J. Gallacher the British Empire Medal for bravery at an air crash near Sungei on 23 November.

In January 1957 the Battalion achieved successes in various ambushes, in which they suffered a few casualties, and in March No. 3 Platoon of 'A' Company was particularly commended by the Perak Operations Sub-Committee of the War Emergency Committee for a successful action against a communist terror platoon. On May 17 the Fusiliers sailed from Penang in the troopship *Dilwara* and arrived home on June 27. Before disembarking the Commanding Officer presented a commemorative plaque to the Captain and ship's company. On arrival in England the Battalion joined the 1st Guards Brigade at Shorncliffe, and all ranks then went on leave.

In December 1957 Major-General Hakewill Smith resigned after twelve years as Colonel of the Regiment and was succeeded by Brigadier A. I. Buchanan-Dunlop, C.B.E., D.S.O.

1st Battalion: *Cyprus*

In May 1958 Lieutenant-Colonel M. J. Evetts, M.C., took over command from Lieutenant-Colonel J. D. O. Delano-Osborne, and on June 13 the Battalion received a warning order to move by air to Cyprus. It was flown out from Ogbourne-St.-George airfield between June 19 and 22 and accommodated in Golden Sands Leave Camp in Cyprus, taking up internal security duties on June 23.

These duties entailed the Battalion being split up into platoons, or even sections, and stationed in the danger areas of Famagusta and its suburbs, to prevent armed hostilities between the Greeks and Turks. This situation threw a tremendous responsibility on platoon commanders and junior noncommissioned officers. It was also a great strain on the administrative element of the

Battalion, which had at the same time to cope with the arrival, unpacking and checking of its heavy weapons, the bulk of its ammunition and stores of all kinds.

Internal security duties lasted until the middle of July, when the Battalion was put at 24 hours' notice to move to Jordan, with orders to train for operations in that country. The outlying companies were called in, but it was not until the middle of August that the Battalion was completely relieved of internal security responsibilities and was able to make progress in its training. The move to Jordan however did not take place.

In September the Fusiliers moved to Yerollakos "B" Camp at Nicosia, where they remained during the rest of their stay in the Island. In fact they constructed most of the camp themselves, with the help of some Royal Engineers and local civilian labour, and subsequently set about improvements to make it as habitable as possible, in case they might have to spend the winter in Cyprus as was for a time anticipated. At the same time training went on at the highest pitch at company and Battalion level, in preparation for the brigade and other exercises which took place during the month. In spite of all these activities the pipes and drums managed to make a recording of the Battalion's pipe music, which was broadcast on September 21st by the British Broadcasting Corporation. In October "B", "C" and Support Companies were out again on internal security duties, while rumours and speculation were rife over the date of the Battalion's departure for home. This was the last occasion on which the Battalion was employed on internal security duties, for on October 17 the advanced party left for the United Kingdom, the main body of the Battalion following between the 20th and 22nd. On arrival the Fusiliers returned to Napier Barracks at Shorncliffe, and departed on leave until the middle of November.

So ended the Scots Fusiliers' last and very short tour of overseas operational service. Those who served with the Battalion from May to November 1958 will remember those months as amongst the busiest in their lives, during which everyone gave of their best and morale was understandably high. Although the order to move to Cyprus caused certain misgivings initially, when it was thought that it would seriously dislocate the process of amalgamation (which is explained and described in the conclusion to this volume) it proved to be a blessing in disguise, since the Battalion was able to keep together until after its final ceremonies in Shorncliffe, as would not have been possible had it remained at home. One final advantage of the Cyprus tour was that the many young soldiers of the Battalion who arrived in mid-June and left in mid-October were in the theatre of operations long enough to qualify for their "wee inch of glory", as they called the General Service Medal with *Cyprus* clasp.

Before leave had ended, preparations for the forthcoming amalgamation had reached a high pitch, the brunt of the work falling on the staffs of the Orderly Room and the Quartermaster's Department. Lieutenant-Colonel Evetts, who had been selected to command the 1st Battalion of the amalgamated Regiment, was invited by Lieutenant-Colonel F. B. B. Noble, O.B.E., commanding the 1st Highland Light Infantry, to attend their farewell parade at Luneberg, where he was welcomed in the same manner as, in days gone by, the commanding officer of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers would have been made welcome by the 2nd Bn of the Regiment.

The last days of the 1st Battalion in Shorncliffe were spent very much in the way in which Battalions of the Regiment have in the past spent their last days at home before a long overseas tour. The Colonel of the Regiment visited the Battalion, and took a ceremonial parade on which the Colours were carried for the last time and marched off to the strains of *Auld Lang Syne*. A Battalion Church parade was held. The bands beat *Retreat*. The officers entertained their friends

from the neighbourhood and from nearby regiments at a cocktail party; they entertained the members of the sergeants' mess, and they celebrated St. Andrew's Night in the traditional manner. The sergeants' mess held several functions, the chief of which was the Inkerman Ball; the Corporals held a Dance; the Fusiliers had a special dinner, and the children a Christmas party; while many serving and retired members of the Regiment visited the Battalion during these days.

After the various festivities the Battalion split up into those going to the Royal Highland Fusiliers or other units in the Lowland Brigade, those departing as individuals to various postings and those remaining at Shorncliffe with the rear party.

The 1st Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers then ceased to exist as a unit, but as they went their various ways, writes Colonel Evetts, those who had been privileged to serve for those last few months in the Battalion were secure in the knowledge that the best traditions of the Regiment would live on in the Royal Highland Fusiliers.

4/5th Battalion: Germany 1945—1946

Orders that a *Cease Fire* was to become operative at 8 a.m. on May 6 1945 reached the 4/5th Battalion, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel A. N. Gosselin, D.S.O., in the Bremen area. The main tasks now were the provision of guards and picquets and the control of prisoners of war. At the end of the month the Battalion moved to Magdeburg, where it assumed the additional responsibility of helping to relieve the plight of the German civilian population. The place was a vast ruin of fire-gutted buildings, in which the inhabitants were living in conditions of indescribable squalor. The city lay astride the Elbe, dominated on the western bank by British, American and French forces, while the Russians occupied the eastern bank. "Friendship bridge", recently erected, was the sole link between the western and eastern sectors, and it was open for a few hours only each day to a two-way traffic of displaced persons and prisoners of war returning to their homes.

On 13th June the 52nd (Lowland) Division, still under command of Major-General Hakewill Smith, moved into Belgium; and the Fusiliers found themselves quartered in the town of Deinze, which had received them when they first landed on the Continent. Lieutenant-Colonel M. R. J. Hope Thomson assumed command of the Battalion on July 6. Mid-August brought a fresh move into Germany. In January 1946 the Battalion was stationed near Paderborne, where the 2nd Bn arrived to share its camp. April of that year saw an event unique in the history of the Regiment, when the 11th Battalion also arrived, bringing three Battalions of the regiment together in the same station.

The first year of peace ended on a sad note, for in June came orders that the 4/5th Battalion was to be placed in a state of suspended animation.

4/5th Battalion: From the re-formation of the Battalion in 1947, to 1958

After having been in suspended animation for nearly a year, the 4/5th Battalion began to reform again at Churchill Barracks on 1st May 1947, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel A. D. G. Orr, D.S.O. At this time it formed part of the 155th (Lowland) Infantry Brigade. Recruiting was slow but steady, and by July 1948 the strength of the Battalion was 11 officers and 175 other ranks. In the meantime Lieutenant-Colonel Gosselin had again assumed command when No. 2!

Preliminary Training Centre closed in April 1948. In June the Battalion provided a royal guard at Holyrood Palace under command of Sergeant Turner, and in October a representative detachment took part in the Royal Review of the Territorial Army by His Majesty King George VI in Hyde Park. Early in the winter Lieutenant-Colonel Gosselin was promoted to command the 154th (Highland) Brigade, and was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel W. P. B. Arkwright, D.S.O.

By 1950 a reorganisation of the Territorial Army had brought the Battalion into the 16th (Lowland) Brigade. The brigade was specialising in amphibious warfare, and it was decided that sites for annual camps suitable for that type of training should be chosen in England instead of the too familiar training areas of Scotland. During camp in Braunton in Devon that year the Battalion distinguished itself by winning the Brigade Commander's Shield for general administrative efficiency and turnout. On 5th November, when the 1st Battalion laid up its old Colours in the Auld Kirk at Ayr, the 4/5th Battalion provided a Guard of Honour, under Major C. Campbell.

By 1951 National Servicemen were steadily increasing the strength of the Territorial Army by joining it on their discharge from regular units, and the pay roll of the Battalion now showed a total of 249. The inhabitants of Braunton were glad to see the return of the Fusiliers for their annual camp that summer. On November 4 the Battalion again found an escort and Colour party for a" laying up "ceremony. This time the Colours were those of the 2nd Bn, suspended in 1948, which were laid up in Paisley Cathedral.

In 1952, increased to full strength by an intake of 432 "Z" reservists, the Fusiliers again visited Devon for their annual camp. The infusion of reservists brought fresh life to the Battalion and inspiration to the training. On November 1 Lieutenant-Colonel Arkwright was succeeded by Lieutenant Colonel C. Campbell, the first Territorial Army officer to command the Battalion since the war. Major G. D. Wilmot, a regular officer, joined the Battalion in the appointment of Training Officer.

In 1953 the 4/5th Battalion was represented on two royal occasions. In London on June 2 a detachment with the Colours lined a sector of the streets during the Coronation Procession of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Again on June 25 the Battalion was present at Paisley during Her Majesty's state visit to Glasgow and Paisley. That year the scene of annual camp reverted to Scotland and the Fusiliers went to Stobs Camp, near Hawick, where training was enlivened by the presence of rocket launchers and flame-throwing tanks. On September 26 the Lord Lieutenant of Ayrshire, on behalf of the Queen, presented the Battalion with their first Colours since the 4th and 5th Battalions were amalgamated in 1922.

For annual training in 1954 the Battalion moved with the I 56th Brigade to Zeebrugge for training in amphibious warfare. Outside working hours the Fusiliers were received with great hospitality by the local inhabitants, who much enjoyed the performances of the pipes and drums beating *Retreat*. In 1955, for the second year running, the Battalion won the Brigade Classification Shield for shooting, before going to annual camp at Dallachy in Banffshire, a success which it repeated the following year.

On July 3 1956 the Fusiliers took part in the reception of the Queen on the occasion of Her Majesty's visit to the Royal Burgh of Ayr. Shortly afterwards the Battalion moved to Barry Camp, in Angus, to spend a fortnight in annual camp. In November command passed from Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell to Lieutenant-Colonel A. R. Crawford. At the same time Major (Quartermaster) C. Foley, M.B.E., T.D., left the 4/5th Battalion. His exceptional record of service

deserves special mention. Joining the 2nd Bn in 1919, he served continuously with it overseas and at home until 1938, reaching the rank of Colour-Sergeant. On the outbreak of war in 1939 he became Quartermaster of the 6th Bn, serving with it in France and Western Europe. During this period he was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire in recognition of his services. After the war he joined the 4/5th Battalion, and on his retirement at the age of 55 he not only held the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal for 19 years Regular Service, but also the Territorial Decoration and two bars for his second spell of 19 years with the war service and Territorial Army Battalions. Annual camp again took place at Barry in 1957, and at Garelochhead the following year, where the Colonel of the Regiment visited the Battalion. 1958 was the Golden Jubilee year of the Territorial Army, and the 4/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers celebrated it at a review and drumhead service in Ayr on June 15, and at a parade before Her Majesty the Queen in Edinburgh on July 5.

THE REGIMENTAL DEPOT: *During and after the Second World War*

The Regimental Depot is the home of the Regiment and has always made a vital contribution to its achievements, as much depends on the standard of the recruits trained at the Depot and passed on to the line Battalions. It is appropriate, therefore, to include in this volume a short account of the activities of the Depot of the Royal Scots Fusiliers from the outbreak of the Second World War to the year 1958. Its home was at Churchill Barracks in Ayr, which at the time this is written still houses the Battalion Headquarters of the 4/5th Royal Scots Fusiliers.

During the war the training of recruits, normally carried out at the Depot, underwent certain modifications. On the outbreak of war an Infantry Training Centre (I.T.C.), under Lieutenant-Colonel B. H. Badham, D.S.O., recalled from retirement, was opened on the racecourse at Ayr, for the training of recruits to the Scots Fusiliers. The Depot was reduced in establishment to a commanding officer, a quartermaster and eight other ranks, and nominally was responsible only for the custody of regimental property, the upkeep of records, care of the regimental museum and the administration of married families. In effect, it became a transit camp for all comers, including a Commando Battalion. Later, the barracks, which in 1942 were named *Churchill Barracks*, accommodated a company of the Auxiliary Territorial Service, and finally Ayr and Dumfries Sub-District made its headquarters there.

Meanwhile the Infantry Training Centre had combined with the I.T.C.s of the Royal Scots and the King's Own Scottish Borderers in August 1941 to form No. 10 I.T.C. at Berwick-on Tweed. In August 1942 this Training Centre moved to Inverness, where Lord Trenchard, the Colonel of the Regiment, visited the Fusiliers; and a year later it went to Dundonald Camp, near Troon. On 21st November 1946 a Combined Training Centre was finally established in Dreghorn Camp at Colinton near Edinburgh, and No. 21 Preliminary Training Centre (P.T.C.) and Depot, for recruits to the Scots Fusiliers only, came into being at Dundonald under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Gosselin. After six weeks elementary training at their P.T.C., the recruits for all Lowland Regiments spent a further 10 weeks on advanced training at the Combined Training Centre. No. 21 P.T.C. closed down on April 21 1948 after 18 months existence, and all recruit training was carried out at Dreghorn Camp, which now became the Lowland Brigade Training Centre. This policy prevailed until January 1952, when the establishment in Churchill Barracks was increased

to receive and train all recruits for the Scots Fusiliers. Thus, the Depot of the Regiment returned to its old home.

Although the Depot had been officially embodied in No. 21 P.T.C. at Dundonald on November 21 1946, the virtual home of the regiment had continued to be in Churchill Barracks, which had retained its reduced war-time establishment. This small party was responsible for postings, releases, drafting and the domestic affairs of the Regiment. To assist the Colonel of the Regiment in his duties, Major H. D. Watt on his retirement in May 1948 took post in Churchill Barracks as Regimental Secretary and Administrative Officer. He still held that appointment when this chapter in the Regiment's history closed.

In spite of alternative offers the Regiment clung tenaciously to its old home in Ayr, and all its members were delighted when, in January 1952, Churchill Barracks was again officially recognised as the Depot and Regimental Headquarters. The Royal Scots Fusiliers Depot remained at Churchill Barracks in December 1958 to combine with the Depot of the Highland Light Infantry preparatory to amalgamation on January 20 1959, when it became the first Regimental Headquarters and Depot of the Royal Highland Fusiliers.

Chapter XIX

AFFILIATED UNITS

Home Defence—The Home Guard—The Army Cadet Force —The Affiliated Commonwealth Regiments

EVERY Regiment consists not only of its regular and territorial Battalions, but of many corporate and affiliated groups, all making their own contribution to the Regiment's history and achievements. During the second World War the 10th Battalion (later to be the 30th Home Defence Battalion) of the Royal Scots Fusiliers was formed for home defence duties, and in addition Local Defence Volunteers were raised in 1940 to meet the threat of invasion. These Local Defence Volunteers (L.D.V.) were later called the Home Guard. Several Battalions were raised in the Ayrshire county area, and an independent company, the South Carrick Company. The cadet units affiliated to the Regiment also expanded rapidly. Originally there were only the school units: Kilmarnock Academy, the oldest cadet unit; Ayr Academy; Ardeer Cadet Company; and Cumnock Academy.

Home Defence

During the Munich crisis in 1938 all counties were asked to raise companies for the protection of vulnerable points within their areas. No. 68 Group National Defence Companies (N.D.C.) consisted of companies raised in Ayrshire, Lanarkshire, Dumfriesshire and Wigtownshire, each company having its own Regimental traditions and badges. Colonel M. B. Buchanan was appointed to command the group. In November 1939 No. 68 Group became the 10th (Home Defence) Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers, comprising the Ayrshire and Lanarkshire Companies;

while the Dumfries and Wigtownshire Companies became the 8th Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers.

The installations for which the Scots Fusiliers were responsible included the Royal Ordnance Factory at Irvine and the Shell Mix and Can Factory at Andresen. Guards were also provided at Ardrossan for ships which arrived there from neutral European ports; while other commitments included guards on the Fleet Air Arm landing ground at Campbeltown and the wireless station at Portpatrick. Battalion Headquarters was originally in Wellington Square at Ayr, but in 1940 it moved to Stranraer. The Commanding Officer was appointed Officer Commanding Troops in that area, where his responsibilities included a Naval Establishment, a Movement Control, a Royal Air Force Establishment and a large detachment of Royal Engineers personnel who were employed in building a new port on Loch Ryan.

During 1940 and 1941 the Battalion became even more widely dispersed, with companies stationed at Wick and in the Orkneys in addition to those in Ayrshire, Dumfriesshire and Wigtownshire. Late in 1941 the company in the Orkneys returned and the Battalion became more concentrated, until in March 1942 the whole of it was together under canvas at Doonfoot near Ayr. There it was equipped with carriers, mortars and Bren guns and was organised on a field force basis, taking in large drafts from Battalions of the Royal Scots, King's Own Scottish Borderers, Cameronians and Highland Light Infantry.

In June 1942 Colonel Buchanan handed over command to Lieutenant-Colonel R. S. McNaught, by which time the Battalion had become the 30th Battalion, a number common to all Home Defence Battalions. In the autumn of 1942 the Battalion moved to Dunfermline, and later to Gornie in Perthshire, where it was finally disbanded in February 1943 as were all other Home Defence Battalions. Its personnel were drafted to field force units of the Royal Armoured Corps, the Royal Army Service Corps and other arms, with which they took part in the campaigns in North Africa.

The Home Guard

In May 1940 the Government made an appeal for recruits to form the Home Guard. Lord Lieutenants of Counties were made responsible for launching the recruiting drive, and administration was placed in the hands of Territorial Army Associations.

The Ayrshire Home Guard contingent was affiliated to the Royal Scots Fusiliers. It was divided into Nos. 1 and 2 Sectors. No. 1 Sector comprised: the 1st Battalion, which covered the north of the county from Skelmorlie to Ardrossan; the 2nd Bn, at Beith, Dairy and Kilwinning; the 3rd at Irvine, Troon, Symington and in part of Prestwick; and the 4th, at Kilmarnock, Stewarton, Kilmaurs, Galston, Newmilns and Darvel. No. 2 Sector in the south comprised: the 5th Battalion, covering Mauchline, Muirkirk, Cumnock, New Cumnock, Tarbolton and Annbank to the sea on the north side of the River Ayr; the 6th, taking in all the county south of the River Ayr; the 7th in Ayr itself; the 8th, the Ardeer Unit (Imperial Chemical Industries); and the South Carrick Company. The two Sectors were under a Zone Commander, who was Colonel T. C. Dunlop, T.D., D.L., A.D.C.; Major D. W. Lennie commanded No. 1 Sector, and Colonel M. B. Buchanan on handing over command of No. 68 Group National Defence Companies became the Commander of No. 2 Sector.

The maximum strength attained was 14,000 all ranks in October 1940. The supply of arms and ammunition was always a problem. For example, by June 30 the Ayrshire Home Guard had enrolled 7,000 men, but had only 250 rifles, with 25,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, supplemented by an assortment of shot guns and rook rifles. In fact, the headquarters was actually armed with one rifle, captured during the Boer War at the turn of the century, with one round of ammunition. Later, a bewildering variety of weapons was issued, some of which were supplied by the United States and included sub-machine guns, flame-throwers, anti-tank weapons, grenades, Molotov cocktails, and Northover projectors, as well as .303 and .22 rifles. The training of units in the use of such a mixed collection of weapons presented a difficult problem, and a Home Guard School was formed at Bridge of Earn. Lack of transport was also a constant limiting factor in the Home Guard.

The Army Cadet Force

During the war years the primary role of the Army Cadet Force units was to provide partially trained personnel for the armed forces. They were diverted as required to any of the armed forces, or even to the coal mines, as the exigencies of the National Service Act demanded, and were always regarded as a suitable source of recruits.

The four cadet companies of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, already mentioned, were attached to the 4/5th Battalion at annual camp in the summer of 1939. The company at the Imperial Chemical Industries works at Ardeer had to close down when all its officers were called up; but the other three continued in being. The Cadet Colonel Commandant, Brigadier-General J. W. Walker, C.M.G., D.S.O., energetically set about raising cadet units throughout the country. Numbers increased rapidly and most schools raised a cadet unit.

After some months of independent existence these scattered units were formed into Battalions, each of which was based on one of the three older cadet companies. The 1st Battalion covered North Ayrshire, the 2nd the centre of the County, and the 3rd South Ayrshire. These Battalions were formed in December 1942, and they continued to render valuable service throughout the war.

THE AFFILIATED COMMONWEALTH REGIMENTS

It is appropriate to mention here the two Regiments affiliated to the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

In 1928 the North Waterloo Regiment of the Canadian Army, which was raised in 1914, became affiliated to the Royal Scots Fusiliers and shortly afterwards changed its name to the Scots Fusiliers of Canada. Although it did not serve overseas as a unit in the second World War, nearly 1,900 members of the Regiment served with various units in Europe, a large number of them with the Highland Light Infantry of Canada. Following a reorganisation of the Canadian Army after the Second World War, the Regiment became the 54th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Scots Fusiliers of Canada) with headquarters at Kitchener, Ontario, but in 1960 it again reverted to an infantry unit as the Scots Pushers of Canada.

The alliance with Prince Alfred's Guard, of the Union of South Africa, was approved by the War Office in 1929. This Regiment was raised in 1896, took part in campaigns in Basutoland and

Bechuanaland and saw service in the South African War of 1899 to 1902, and in both World Wars. A number of its officers gave splendid service in Battalions of the Royal Scots Fusiliers during the Second World War.

CONCLUSION

This volume concludes with the turn of a new and important page in the long and eventful history of the Twenty-First.

Periodically between wars the British Army is subject to major changes in organisation, usually with the purpose of making economies and reductions in its existing structure. In 1957 Parliament announced such a plan to reduce the fighting arms of the service. In the infantry no less than thirty regiments were to be joined in pairs, reducing the Line from sixty-seven to fifty-two regiments. In Scotland three Highland regiments were affected by the plan, and one Lowland Regiment—the Royal Scots Fusiliers.

This misfortune had not previously befallen the Twenty-First. Its chosen partner was The Highland Light Infantry, which before 1881 had itself been two famous fighting regiments, the 71st and 74th Highlanders. In Scotland, more perhaps than in some other parts of the United Kingdom, the civilian population has adopted a possessive attitude towards its own regiments, which it holds in affection and regard. The announcement caused a public outcry in the regimental areas. There was a demonstration in Glasgow, and much publicity in the popular press of a nature most distasteful to members of both regiments, neither of which was serving in Scotland at the time. A formal protest against the ill-chosen union of a Lowland with a Highland regiment, sponsored by the Colonels of both regiments, was submitted to the Prime Minister, but without avail. Later, a form of compromise, concerning title and dress, by which the two regiments might agree to become one, was rejected by the Army Council. As a result both Colonels resigned.

To succeed Major-General E. Hakewill Smith as Colonel of The Royal Scots Fusiliers his brother officers chose Brigadier A I. Buchanan-Dunlop, then serving as Deputy Adjutant General in the Far East. Appointed in December he travelled home by air early in 1958 to begin discussions with Major-General E. A. Bramwell Davis, the newly appointed Colonel of The Highland Light Infantry.

It was decided to begin the welding of the two regiments by the choice of an acceptable title. With the agreement of the regimental councils the name chosen was: *The Royal Highland Fusiliers*. After an interval, during which the two Colonels had personal interviews with the Adjutant-General to the Forces and the Secretary of State for War, that title received the approval of the Army Council. Meanwhile Her Royal Highness The Princess Margaret, then Colonel-in-Chief of The Highland Light Infantry, had graciously accepted an invitation to become Colonel-

in-Chief of The Royal Highland Fusiliers; and the words: *Princess Margaret's Own Glasgow and Ayrshire Regiment* were added in parenthesis to the title.

Next in importance came the question of dress. It was finally agreed that the Regiment should wear the Mackenzie tartan trews of The Highland Light Infantry with the Royal Scots Fusiliers' Glengarry, a head-dress unique at that time since General Hakewill Smith had succeeded in retaining it for the Scots Fusiliers when other Lowland regiments chose the Kilmarnock bonnet; and that the pipers of the Regiment should wear kilts of the Dress Erskine, a privilege accorded to the Twenty-first to mark its 250th anniversary thirty years before. There followed a careful but amicable process of give and take until all details of dress and equipment were settled. At the same time work went steadily forward on the joint preparation of regimental standing orders which were designed to preserve to the full the ancient traditions and more recent customs of both regiments.

During December and January the two serving regular Battalions moved to Redford Barracks in Edinburgh, and on January 20 1959 the Royal Scots Fusiliers and The Highland Light Infantry became The Royal Highland Fusiliers. The Territorial Army Battalions remained unaffected by change in title or dress. General Bramwell Davis was appointed Colonel and Brigadier Buchanan-Dunlop Associate Colonel of the Regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel M. J. Evetts assumed command of the 1st Battalion, numbering thirty-two officers and eight hundred and nine rank and file, and Major C. W. Dunbar took over the Regimental Headquarters and Depot at Ayr. Loyal greetings were despatched to Her Majesty The Queen and to the Colonel-in-Chief; good wishes were received from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (at that time Field- Marshal Sir Francis Festing, an old friend and mentor of the Regiment) and other distinguished officers, from sister regiments in the Highland and Lowland Brigades and from affiliated regiments in the Commonwealth forces.

In the course of a long and active life a regiment comes by many names. The regiment which had been the *Earl of Mar's*, the *Twenty-First*, the *Royal North British Fusiliers*, the *Royal Scots Fusiliers*, was now to play its part under a further title; *The Royal Highland Fusiliers (Princess Margaret's Own Glasgow and Ayrshire Regiment)*. In the Army List the numbers of the Regiment were now *21st*, *7sst* and *74th*; its place in the Line, twenty-first; the strength of its partnership denoted by the motto: *nos impune lacessit*. "This is not the end"—was the message of Sir Winston Churchill in similar circumstances to the regiment he had once joined from Sandhurst—"this is not the end of two old regiments, but the beginning of a new life together."

The union was marked by the presentation of new Colours to the Regiment by its Colonel-in-Chief at Glasgow on May 12. Twenty-nine battle honours were embroidered on the Queen's Colour, and on the Regimental Colour forty-six—a proud record. There followed a sequence of ceremonies, at which the Regiment was first presented with the Freedoms of the City of Glasgow and the Royal Burgh of Ayr, and then laid up its old Colours. The resting place chosen as most appropriate for the Colours of the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers, having regard to the origins of the senior Battalion of the Regiment, was the Shrine of the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle.

During the ceremony Brigadier Buchanan-Dunlop addressed the Lord Provost of Edinburgh in these words: "My Lord Provost... I request you to accept these Colours of the 1st Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers, which was first raised in many parts of Scotland, for safe keeping in perpetuity in this National Shrine."

Men of the Twenty-First have many memorials. The most recent was raised by their comrades in proud and grateful memory of those Royal Scots Fusiliers who gave their lives in the World War of 1939 to 1945. It is an eight foot bronze figure of a Fusilier in battle dress—the figure of a “bonny fechter” is the sculptor’s own description—which stands in a garden on the Low Green at Ayr, facing to seaward. The plinth is inscribed:

“They died that we might remain free.” Near to the statue is a separate granite tablet, with this inscription.:

“To commemorate the services in many parts of the world in peace and war of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. Raised in 1678, the Regiment served until 1959, when it joined in partnership with the Highland Light Infantry to continue its service as The Royal Highland Fusiliers.”

Appendix

SUCCESSION OF COMMANDING OFFICERS

1st Battalion

From

January 1919	A.D. McInnes Shaw
May 1919	F.E. Buchanan
July 1922	O.H. Delano-Osborne
February 1925	C.H. I. Jackson
February 1928	H C. Maitland-Makgill-Crichton
April 1931	A. C. L. Stanley-Clarke
October 1934	B.H. Badham
January 1938	D.S. Davidson
September 1939	W.E. Clutterbuck
October 1940	J.F. Armstrong
June 1943	W.S. Ritchie
March 1945	J. B. M. Sloane
June 1946	A.I. Buchanan-Dunlop
August 1947	J. D. O. Delano-Osborne
October 1948	D. J. A. Stuart
September 1949	W.S. Ritchie
September 1952	M. R. J. Hope Thomson
May 1955	J. D. O. Delano-Osborne
May 1958	M.J. Evetts

2nd Bn

From

June 1919	R.K. Walsh
June 1923	H.E. R. R. Braine
June 1927	R.Q. Crauford
December 1930	R. V.O. Horn
December 1934	R. A. D. Moseley
December 1938	W. Tod
June 1940	R. G. W. Callaghan
December 1941	I. D. McInnes
January 1944	. K. Sixsmith
March 1944	P..J. S. Boyle
June 1944	J.L. Maxwell
July 1947	D. J. A. Stuart
October 1947	A.I. Buchanan-Dunlop
September 1948	D. J. A. Stuart

4th Battalion

From

December 1918

February 1920

January 1922

C. Gibb

J.R. Turner

H. H. Northey

5th Battalion

From

December 1918

July 1919

D. Murray-Lyon

D.M. Wilkie

Amalgamated

4/5th Battalion

From

July 1923

January 1924

January 1929

January 1934

January 1938

July 1940

September 1940

May 1941

March 1942

July 1946

May 1947

May 1948

January 1949

November 1952

November 1956

November 1959

H. H. Northey

C. L. C. Hamilton

M. B. Buchanan

J. D. Oatts

T.M. Lawrie

H.A. Holme

E. Hakewill Smith

K. W. D. Strong

A. N. Gosselin

M. R. J. Hope Thomson

A.D.G.Orr

A.N. Gosselin

W. P. B. Arkwright

C. Campbell

A.R. Crawford

D. O. Carleton-Smith-Inglis

6th Bn

From

April 1939

Lord Rowallan

July 1940
December 1943
August 1944
January 1946

N. MacLeod
C.R. Buchanan
I. MacKenzie
J. D. O. Delano-Osborne

11th Battalion
From

June 1940
May 1942
July 1944
November 1945

W. M. Syfret
W. H. J. Montgomery-Cunninghame
D. A. D. Eykyn
P.S. Sandilands